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THE

WORKS

Of the Moſt Reverend

Dr. *JOHN SHARP*,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of *YORK*.

VOL. VI. CONTAINING,

NINETEEN

SERMONS,

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

The THIRD EDITION.

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SERMON I.

What hereſy is. Why permitted by God. And the great uſefulneſs and advantages of it to the church.

1 Cor. xi. 19.

For there muſt be alſo Hereſies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifeſt among you.

IT is a great ſtumbling-block to ſome among us, and almoſt tempts them to doubt of the truth of our religion, to ſee how many ſects and diviſions there are at this day among chriſtians. The removing this ſtumbling-block is the thing I deſign at this time; and my text lays a very good foundation towards it; St. Paul having ſeveral ages ago told us, that there *muſt be hereſies*, and withal given us a good reaſon why there muſt be, *viz.* that *they which are approved may be made manifeſt.*

The method I ſhall obſerve in treating on theſe words, ſhall be as follows:

I. To give ſome account of what is here meant by hereſies.

II. To ſhew how it comes to paſs that there always *muſt be hereſies*.

III. To ſhew for what reaſons God permits hereſies, and what purpoſes they ſerve.

IV. To make an application of the whole.

I. I begin with the firſt point, What is meant by hereſies. Now as to this, it is to be obſerved, that the word hereſy is often to be met with in ſcripture; and ſometimes in that ſenſe in which it is commonly uſed by profane authors, when it imports no more than ſome conſiderable difference in opinion, or ſuch a diſtinction of men as to their judgment, as makes them of a different ſect from the reſt they converſe with. And thus chriſtianity itſelf is ſtyled a hereſy in the 28th of the Acts, ver. 22. But then it cannot be denied that the word is often taken in a bad ſenſe, and undoubtedly it is ſo in my text; and beſides the bare difference of opinion, or being of a different ſect from others, denotes ſome great fault in the man that holds that opinion, or that is of that ſect. Were it not thus, we cannot imagine that St. Paul, when he is reckoning up the works of the fleſh, ſuch as murder and adultery, and the like, ſhould put in hereſy among them, as he doth in the 5th of Galatians, ver. 20. Well, now the queſtion is, What is meant by hereſy, when it is taken in a bad ſenſe, when it is made one of the works of the fleſh? Now, in anſwer to this, I ſay there are two notions of hereſy in the New-teſtament, when that word is taken in an ill ſenſe: for ſometimes it is uſed with reſpect to the chriſtian faith; and ſometimes with reſpect

reſpect to chriſtian peace and communion. Of both theſe I ſhall now give an account.

1. Hereſy is ſometimes uſed with reſpect to the chriſtian faith, and then the notion of it is this: It is a departure from, or a renouncing of ſome neceſſary article of the chriſtian religion; and that not ſo much thro' ignorance or miſtake, as from a vicious principle, and for the ſerving ſome ſenſual deſires or intereſts. This, I ſay, is the notion of hereſy with reference to faith, as far as we can judge from thoſe texts of ſcripture which ſpeak of it in this ſenſe. St. Peter thus deſcribes heretics, 2 Pet. ii. 1. He tells us, that *as there were falſe prophets among the Jews*, ſo there ſhould *be falſe teachers among the chriſtians, who ſhould privily bring in damnable hereſies, even denying the Lord who bought them: and thro' covetouſneſs, with feigned words, making merchandize of ſouls*, ver. 3. St. *Paul* alſo bids *Titus*, chap. iii. 10, 11. *to reject an heretic, after the firſt and ſecond admonition, foraſmuch as he that is ſuch, is ſubverted and ſinneth, being condemned of himſelf.* Theſe are the two principal texts of ſcripture that ſpeak of hereſy or hereticks with reference to matters of faith; and I doubt not but it is from theſe two texts, that the common eccleſiaſtical notion of hereſy, as it is diſtinguiſhed from ſchiſm, is taken up. But now from theſe two texts we plainly ſee, that hereſy is not ſo much a fault of a man's underſtanding, as of his will. In the ſenſe of theſe two apoſtles, he only is an heretic that denies ſome fundamental truths of Chriſt's religion, that ſubverts the faith, and teaches doctrines inconſiſtent with chriſtianity; and this out of evil principles, ſo that his own conſcience cannot but accuſe him. But he is not a heretic, however he may be miſtaken in matters of religion, who holds to the

foundation of the chriſtian faith, and means honeſtly, and endeavours to inform himſelf as well as he can. So that it is in every man's power to avoid the being a heretic; and none but a wicked perſon can be ſo. St. Auguſtin, I am ſure, was of this opinion, when he ſaid, *Errare poſſum, hæreticus eſſe nolo*; I may be under errors or miſtakes, but I will not be an heretic. Intimating that it was not ſo much defect of the underſtanding, as vice and ſin and a corrupt inclination of mind, that made a man to deſerve that name.

The reflection I make upon what I have now ſaid about hereſy in matters of faith, is this: We ſee from hence how groundleſly, how unreaſonably, we proteſtants are charged with hereſy by our adverſaries. They make no ſcruple of calling us heretics, and telling us we ſhall be damned upon that account, unleſs we come over to their belief. Why, what is it they would have us believe? We believe all that Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles taught to the world, ſo far as we have knowledge of it. We believe all the holy ſcriptures, and not only ſo, but we make them the rule of our faith. We believe all thoſe articles of faith into which all chriſtians in every country from Chriſt's time to this have been baptiſed, and which by all the antients have been accounted a perfect ſummary of the chriſtian faith; nor do we hold any thing inconſiſtent with them. We own both Chriſt's ſacraments; and we adminiſter them intirely. We renounce all the hereſies that were condemned by the antient general councils; nay, we are ready to refer ourſelves to thoſe councils, and to the primitive fathers who lived at that time, for the trial of all the points which are diſputed between us. And laſtly, we are ſure we are not obſtinate in our errors, if they ſhould prove ſo; we are ſure

ſure we have no ſecular ends to ſerve in the maintaining them; and moſt of all ſure we are, that we are not ſelf-condemned, that our own conſcience doth not accuſe us for being of this way; (which yet is one of thoſe things that go to the making of an heretic:) Now if all theſe things can be truly ſaid of us, (as I think they may be truly ſaid of the church of England, and of all the honeſt members of it) how is it poſſible that we can in any ſenſe be guilty of hereſy? In the ſenſe of the ſcriptures and of the fathers I am ſure we are orthodox chriſtians: and in the ſenſe of the greateſt divines, even in the Roman communion, I am ſure we are no heretics. And if, after all that, we muſt be branded with that name, all that we can ſay is, that *after the way which they call hereſy, ſo worſhip we the God of our fathers*, Acts xxiv. 14.

But, 2dly, there is another notion of hereſy in the holy ſcriptures, beſides that I have now mentioned; and that is with reſpect to eccleſiaſtical peace and communion: as a man who deſerts the faith is guilty of hereſy, ſo is he who cauſeleſly breaks the communion of the church, a heretic alſo, in the language of the ſcripture.

Now in this ſenſe hereſy is the ſame thing with that which we call ſchiſm; and in this ſenſe I do verily believe St. Paul meant it in the text I am now upon. That he did ſo, will appear to any one who will look two verſes backwards, and obſerve how the text comes in. In the 17th verſe of this chapter St. Paul tells the Corinthians, that he had one thing *to declare to them, for which he was far from praiſing them:* and that was, *that they came together not for the better, but for the worſe.* Now what that was which rendered their aſſemblies ſo unprofitable, or rather ſo prejudicial to

them, he tells them in the 18th verſe; *For*, ſays he, *when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be diviſions among you:* [The original words are, σχισματα, *I hear there be ſchiſms among you:*] and, ſays he, *I partly believe it*; and then he gives the reaſon why he is ſo inclinable to believe this of them in the words of my text, For, ſays he, *there muſt be hereſies among you.* So that it is evident that what he called ſchiſms or diviſions in the former verſe, he calls hereſies in the following verſe, and conſequently that he meant the ſame thing by both thoſe words. It is wholly indifferent to my preſent buſineſs in which of theſe two ſenſes the words of my text be interpreted. I ſhall in what I have further to ſay have reſpect to both; only before I proceed, I would make a reflection upon this notion of hereſy, as I did upon the former. According to the ſenſe I have now given of the text, every one who makes diviſions, every one that cauſeth ſchiſms, is guilty of hereſy. This is true, and let thoſe who are concerned in it look to it. It muſt be acknowledged, that as chriſtianity now ſtands in the world, nay as it hath ſtood for ſeveral ages, there have been, and are a great many diviſions and ſchiſms in the church. They who are united in one common faith, are not united in one common communion, as the primitive churches were. That is indeed the infelicity and miſery of Chriſtendom; and all good men do ſadly lament it. But woe be to them by whom this offence cometh!

There are who call us ſchiſmatics, becauſe we are now in a ſtate of ſeparation from the church of Rome upon account of our reformation. But we are ſure we do not deſerve that name. If indeed it did appear either that that church was the only catholic church, out

out of which there is no ſalvation; or that we had departed farther from that church, or any church, than we are convinced they have departed from the primitive rule of Chriſt and his apoſtles; or that what was done in our reformation, was done without lawful and ſufficient authority; or that at this day we refuſe communion with any, or with all the churches in the world, upon ſuch terms as either the laws of Chriſt will allow us, or the primitive churches would have ſubmitted to; I ſay, if any of theſe things could be made out againſt us, there would be ſome colour to accuſe us of ſchiſm from the catholic church for adhering to our reformation. But ſince it may be made evident that the quite contrary to all theſe things is true; ſince it may be made evident that the Roman church is but a particular church, and that we in this nation have within ourſelves as full and as independant authority to reform abuſes in doctrine and worſhip, as ſhe or any other church hath; and ſince it may be made evident that nothing was done in our reformation but by lawful and good authority, and that we have in no inſtance departed from the catholic church, no nor from the Roman, ſave where their terms of communion were inconſiſtent with our duty to God; and that we are at this day ready to join in communion with all the churches in the world, upon the primitive catholic terms: I ſay, this being our caſe, it is as impoſſible we ſhould be guilty of ſchiſm in adhering to our reformation, as it is we ſhould be guilty of hereſy, when we own all catholic doctrines.

Having thus given an account of hereſy, both as it ſignifies a departure from faith, and a departure from eccleſiaſtical communion, I now come, in the ſecond

place, to give ſome account of St. Paul's propoſition, that there *muſt be hereſies*, take that word in which of the two ſenſes you pleaſe. St. Paul ſays, that *there muſt be hereſies*; that is to ſay, it cannot be avoided, but that there will be errors and miſtakes in matters of faith; there will be ſects, and parties, and factions in religion; nay, it cannot be avoided, but there will be ſuch men as will endeavour to bring in dangerous doctrines into the church. *I know*, ſays St. Paul in another place, Acts xx. 29, 30, *that grievous wolves ſhall enter in among you, not ſparing the flock, and of yourſelves ſhall men ariſe ſpeaking perverſe things to draw away the diſciples after them.* And this indeed is no more than what our Saviour had told us before; *Wo*, ſays he, *unto the world becauſe of offences, for it muſt needs be that offences come*, Matt. xviii 7. Ἀνάγκη γάρ ἐστιν, there is a neceſſity for it; or, as St. Luke, chap. xvii 1, expreſſes it, Ἀνένδεκτόν ἐστι μὴ ἐλθεῖν; *It is impoſſible but offences will come.* Now certainly among thoſe offences which our Saviour ſpeaks of, hereſies and ſchiſms were not the leaſt.

But it will be aſked, Why muſt there be hereſies and ſchiſms? Whence doth the neceſſity of them ariſe? I anſwer, It doth ariſe from the preſent corrupt frame of human nature, and the conſtitution of things in this world. To ſay that there will always be hereſies and ſchiſms, is no more than to ſay that there will always be in the world ſome men who will be ſo knaviſh, as for worldly ends, to endeavour to ſeduce others from the ways of truth and peace; and that there will be others ſo fooliſh as to be ſeduced by them. Hence it is that all hereſies and ſchiſms do ariſe; and till it pleaſe God to keep ſin and folly out of the world, and by an over-ruling hand to preſerve men from abuſing that natural

natural liberty he hath given them; I say, till God doth this, it cannot be expected that the church should be free from these things. It is not for want of a plain rule to know our duty, that any man becomes either a heretic or schismatic; nor is it his own venturing to make a judgment of that rule, which makes him so. For as the rule of religion is infinitely plain in all necessary points, (and as for unnecessary ones it is not a farthing matter how much men differ about them, so long as they do not break charity and the church's peace upon account thereof) I say, as the rule of religion is infinitely plain in all necessary matters; so when all is done every man must judge for himself as to the meaning of that rule. But here is the thing: It is the want of honesty and virtue, it is vice and sin, it is pride or ambition, or envy or discontent; it is the love of the world, and the desire of serving some secular interest; I say, these are the things that make an heretic; these are the things that both gave birth to all the heresies and schisms that are among christians; and will perpetuate them to the world's end. And this I suppose is abundantly sufficient to make out the truth of St. Paul's proposition, that there *must be heresies*. For so long as God is pleased to permit sin and folly in the world, so long he must be supposed to permit heresies.

But it will be said, Is not God in the mean time very unkind to his church, by suffering it to be thus exposed to divisions and false opinions? How can this consist either with his promises in the scripture, or with the goodness of his providence? I answer; That as to the promises which God has made in scripture concerning his church, they are all safe, whatever heresies or schisms there be in the world. For all that God hath

promiſed about the church in ſcripture, is this, that there ſhall always be a company of men profeſſing his true religion, with whom he will be preſent by the influence of his holy Spirit even to the end of the world. Now this promiſe Chriſt hath hitherto made good, and we doubt not will do ſo as long as the world laſts. But he has no where promiſed that his church ſhall be free from errors or diviſions: on the contrary, both himſelf and his apoſtles have told us that we are to expect ſuch things. And then as for the other point, how this can conſiſt with the goodneſs of God's providence, the anſwer is eaſy: For the ſame reaſon that God is pleaſed to permit the vices and wickedneſſes of mankind, for the ſame reaſon he is pleaſed to permit hereſies and ſchiſms in the church. And the reaſon both of the one and the other is very obvious, *viz.* that very great and good ends are ſerved by them. The common method of God's providence is to ſuffer all his creatures to act according to the powers which he hath conferred upon their natures, and accordingly having endued mankind with liberty and choice, ſo as that they may do well or do ill, he permits them to exerciſe thoſe powers, tho' oftentimes they employ them to ill purpoſes. But then here appears the wiſdom and goodneſs of his providence, that he has ſo contrived things, that that which is bad in itſelf, and very bad likewiſe to them that do it, ſhall prove very good if we reſpect the whole creation. My meaning is this, God doth not hinder natural events, but he ſo orders matters, that very excellent ends and purpoſes are ſerved by the worſt things that happen in the world. Hereſy and ſchiſm are very bad things, and woe be to them who have any hand in them: but yet for all that, they bring a great deal of good to mankind. And I

do

do not in the leaſt doubt but St. Paul had an eye to this in the words of my text. We render them thus, *There muſt be hereſies*; but in the original they ſeem to import ſomewhat more. The Latin verſion fully expreſſes it, *Oportet eſſe hæreſes*; *it is fit, it is meet, it is convenient there ſhould be hereſies*, becauſe many excellent ends are ſerved by them; a great deal accrues from them to the church of Chriſt. And this leads me to the third general head I am to inſiſt on, *viz.*

III. To ſhew for what reaſon God permits hereſies, and what ends they ſerve for; and particularly to explain the reaſon given by St. Paul, *viz. that they which are approved may be made manifeſt.*

1. And here I cannot but in the firſt place take notice of this, that the being of hereſies and diviſions amongſt chriſtians, is a great confirmation to us not only that the ſcripture is our true rule of faith, but alſo that we have the true ſcriptures. It has often been taken notice of as a very remarkable thing, and really it is ſo, that the Jews, who have ceaſed to be a commonwealth for above 1600 years, and have had no place of abiding, but have been, and are ſcattered into all the places of the habitable world; nay farther, at ſeveral times all means imaginable have been uſed for the rooting them out from the face of the earth; do yet, notwithſtanding all this, continue not only in being, but continue as diſtinct from all other people, and as obſtinately tenacious of their own religion, as they were when they lived under their own government in the land of Canaan. There is no inſtance like this to be given in ſtory. What uſe now is to be made of this? Why (as many have obſerved, and St. Auſtin particularly) this is a ſtanding proof of the chriſtian

religion;

religion; and that (to omit other inſtances) in this reſpect theſe people are the bittereſt adverſaries that the chriſtian religion ever had; but yet theſe people always have, and ſtill do own, nay and are very zealous for that very canon of ſcripture upon which we chriſtians do ground our religion, and from which we fetch the chief arguments that we bring againſt them. Nay, and they of all ſorts of people have been the moſt careful to preſerve copies of theſe ſcriptures entire, and free from any corruption or alteration. From whence we chriſtians have a demonſtrative argument, that the ſcriptures of the Old-teſtament, which we urge againſt the Jews, are ſincere and uncorrupted; that there have been no tricks played, no fraud or forgery uſed by us to make theſe writings ſpeak as they do, ſince the greateſt enemies we have in the world do bear teſtimony to us that we have the true ſcriptures, and do themſelves make uſe of the ſame copies which we do.

To bring this now to our purpoſe: The ſame thing that the Jews our adverſaries do for the Old-teſtament, do the heretics and ſchiſmatics among us for the new. Had not theſe been in the church, we could not have been ſo ſecure of the rule of our faith: neither the authority, nor the ſufficiency, nor the genuineneſs and uncorruptedneſs of the new-teſtament, could ever ſo well have been made to appear. But now ſince there always have been hereſies and diverſities of opinions, ſince there always have been ſchiſms and factions in the church of Chriſt, and all of theſe, how diſagreeing ſoever otherwiſe, have always pleaded the ſcripture for themſelves, and have appealed to the writings of the apoſtles and evangeliſts, as the infallible rule by which they would have their doctrines to be tried;

tried; and ſince further their books differ nothing from ours, but they read and quote the goſpels and epiſtles as we do, without any material difference or variation, and have always done ſo, (excepting ſome few of the antient heretics, who were ſo bold as utterly to reject ſome entire books of our preſent canon;) I ſay, laying all theſe things together, it is a very ſtrong argument, both that our ſcriptures are the only true and certain rule by which we are to be determined in matters of faith, and alſo that they are purely and ſincerely conveyed to us without any conſiderable variation from the original copies. Which two things are of conſiderable moment and importance to every chriſtian. And yet theſe two things could not have been near ſo well evidenced and made out, had there been no hereſies or diviſions in the chriſtian church. By the being of theſe we gain teſtimony of our adverſaries both to the truth and the integrity of the rule we proceed by. And the teſtimony of an adverſary is in all diſputes accounted the ſtrongeſt proof that can be given of a thing.

2dly, Another excellent end that hereſies ſerve in the world, and for which God permits them, is this, that they extremely tend to excite mens induſtry, and to put them upon the ſearch of truth. They prove an excellent means to perſuade men that they ought not in matters of ſalvation be preſcribed to by others; but that they ſhould examine all things, and *hold faſt to that* which, upon their examination, they found *to be true and good*, according to the apoſtle's rule, 1 Theſſ. v. 21.

God Almighty did not make us engines and machines to be acted and moved at the pleaſure of others; but having given us the power of reaſon and judgment,

he meant we ſhould exerciſe them not only in matters of a civil, temporal concernment, but alſo in matters of religion too. He deſigned not only that every one of us ſhould ſatisfy ourſelves about our religion, but that we ſhould take ſome pains in gaining that ſatisfaction to ourſelves; that we ſhould employ the beſt of our ſkill, and our wit, and our parts in inquiring into theſe matters; that ſo we might perform to him a reaſonable ſervice. There is none can deny but that this is a deſign both worthy of God, and moſt ſuitable to the nature and faculties of men. But now how could this deſign have been ſerved, at leaſt half ſo effectually, if there had not been differences in opinion? If there had not been hereſies, and falſe doctrines, and ſchiſms in the world? If all men from the beginning of chriſtianity had been of the ſame belief, and perſuaſion, and communion, what occaſion would any man have had to examine or inquire into the grounds and principles of his religion? What would he have to do further as a chriſtian, than only to believe and practiſe as he ſaw others do before him? that is to ſay, all mens parts and induſtry muſt have been turned quite another way; and the buſineſs of religion would not at all have employ'd them. And they would indeed have been at a profound peace, but at the ſame time all ſtudy and ſearch into truth would have been ſuperſeded. A numbneſs and ſtupidity would have ſeized all their faculties, and ignorance and an implicit faith would then (as it is now in all places where they make it their buſineſs by fire and inquiſition to prevent all differences in opinion) have been the only parents of devotion.

Whereas on the contrary, hereſies and ſchiſms in the church, tho' they be ill in themſelves, and, as I ſaid before, woe be to thoſe who cauſe them, or foment them,

them, or have any thing to do with them; yet by the wiſe contrivance of God's providence, whoſe method it is to bring good out of evil, I ſay they ſerve to this good uſe, that they whet mens induſtry, and put them upon thinking, and keep them from being ſecure in, or reſting upon any one bare authority, till they have fully inquired into the matter. By which means, if they uſe their faculties as they ſhould do, they are enabled to ſerve God as he deſires to be ſerved, that is to ſay, in a way ſuitable to the nature of mankind, which is with reaſon and underſtanding.

3. But, Thirdly, As the being of hereſies in the world doth quicken mens diligence, and excite them to a more ſerious inquiry into the affairs of religion, ſo doth it alſo tend very much to the advancement of truth; and many points hereby have been fully and ſatisfactorily cleared, which otherwiſe might probably ſtill have remained in obſcurity. Of this I give but this one argument. All thoſe who have in the leaſt dealt in antiquity, know how looſely and unwarily the firſt writers of the church expreſſed themſelves as to ſome points of religion. And the reaſon is, thoſe points were not then ſufficiently ſifted; there had been at that time no controverſies moved about them. But afterwards when heretics aroſe, and taught in thoſe matters things contrary to ſound doctrine, and the ſenſe of the church, this gave occaſion to thoſe who were concerned, more narrowly to inquire into thoſe matters, and upon that inquiry they gained many points of truth, which before poſſibly were not thought of, or at leaſt not ſo diſtinctly apprehended. And from henceforward they expreſſed themſelves leſs ambiguouſly, and with more accuracy, and with greater evidence. And this is eaſy to be made appear both in the Arian and

and Pelagian controverſies, and in a great many others. And, in truth, take what points of religion, what articles of faith we will, experience will ſhew, that the more obſtinately that point or article hath been denied, that denial and oppoſition hath occaſioned both a clearer diſtinction of truth from falſhood in that point or article, and a ſtronger confirmation and proof of that truth; and hath beſides often brought to light many new propoſitions of truth, ſome of which poſſibly were not at all before taken notice of, and ſome of them not believed, aud ſome of them, tho' believed, yet neither rightly expreſſed nor ſufficiently proved. For the truth of this, I might give remarkable inſtances in moſt of the points diſputed between the church of Rome and us from the beginning of the reformation to this time. But it is not my deſign to enter now into theſe particulars: but I proceed in the

4th place, to conſider another excellent end for which God permits hereſies in the church; and that is the particular reaſon given by the apoſtle in my text; *viz.* the trial of mens ſincerity, faith and conſtancy. *There muſt*, ſays he, *be hereſies, that thoſe which are approved may be made manifeſt*; *i. e.* that they who are ſincere and honeſt may by this trial be known and diſtinguiſhed from others who are not ſo. And to the ſame purpoſe doth old Simeon affirm, that our Saviour *was ſet up for the fall and riſing again of many in Iſrael, and for a ſign that ſhould be ſpoken againſt, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed*, Luke ii. 34, 35. *i. e.* our Saviour's perſon and doctrine ſhould meet with much oppoſition and contradiction, that hereby the inward diſpoſitions of mens hearts, and their pretences to religion might be diſcovered, whether they were honeſt and ſincere or no. And thus alſo

St.

St. John in his firſt epiſtle, chap. ii. 19. ſpeaking of the antichriſts or heretics of thoſe days, *They went out*, ſays he, *from us, that it might be made manifeſt that they were not of us.* Here therefore is one great uſe that God in his providence makes of the quarrels, and contentions, and hereſies, and ſchiſms that happen among chriſtians. They ſerve the ſame ends to believers within the church, that perſecution doth from without. God permits them for the exerciſe and improvement of the virtue of the good, and for the diſcovery of the ill deſigns and hypocritical profeſſions of the bad. If all men had been of one faith and of one communion, where would have been the trial of the faith and patience of the ſaints? What occaſion would they have had to exerciſe their courage and conſtancy in ſtanding up for the truth? How ſhould either others or they themſelves have known whether they were ſincere, or whether they did not take up their religion for the ſerving ſome private intereſt or ſecular deſign? Farther, What would have become of that peace of conſcience and thoſe comfortable reflections that good men after they have once been tried may make upon their own ſincerity, and which cauſeth a continual joy of heart to them? And where had been thoſe additional glories and rewards in the other world, with which God crowns all thoſe who have endured temptation, and yet are found faithful to the laſt? Laſtly, to ſay no more, how ſhould either the knavery, the ambition, the ſelf-ſeeking, or the treachery, inconſtancy, and cowardice of many pretenders to religion have been detected? Theſe ends every body ſees are for the good of the church, and the good of all honeſt men; but yet they could not have been attained had there been no diviſions or falſe religions in the world.

IV.

IV. And thus much of my third general head. I come now to the fourth and laſt, which is, to make ſome application of what has been ſaid, and ſo conclude.

And firſt of all; Since it appears that there always will, and unavoidably muſt be hereſies, differences in opinion concerning religion, falſe doctrines, and diviſions, and the like; from hence we gather, how abſurd and unreaſonable thoſe men are, who think it a ſufficient reaſon why they ſhould deny or reject a religion or doctrine, becauſe all men are not agreed about it, or becauſe they who in general own and profeſs that religion or doctrine, are yet at difference among themſelves about ſeveral points relating to it.

This inference I chiefly direct againſt the atheiſtical infidel ſort of men among us, who think they do ſufficiently baffle all religion when they tell us, that mankind are not yet agreed about the true one. The Turks, ſay they, have one religion, the Jews another, the Pagans another, the Chriſtians another, and all theſe ſeveral ſorts of men are peremptory and confident that they only have the true religion, and that all the reſt are miſtaken, and are in a dangerous condition for being ſo. What therefore, ſay they, have we to do in this caſe? With whom ſhall we join? All theſe men pretend to have the true religion among them, which of them ſhall we believe? Is it not much to be preſumed that they are all equally in a miſtake, and that religion (how much noiſe ſoever it makes) is nothing but a pretence? And till men be agreed what religion is, or where it is to be found, it is the wiſeſt to be of no religion at all, or rather, to be ſeemingly of any, that beſt ſerves our turns and intereſts. This is the

concluſion

concluſion that they draw from theſe premiſes: but how monſtrouſly abſurd and illogical is it! It is juſt as if they ſhould thus argue; becauſe there are a great many counterfeit ſtones go about in the world, therefore there are no true jewels, and a man whoſe profeſſion lies that way, is not concerned to make uſe of his ſkill, and reaſon, and judgment for the diſtinguiſhing between the one and the other. It is juſt as if a ſick man ſhould reſolve, that till all phyſicians were agreed about the nature of his diſtemper, and gave the ſame account of it, and preſcribed the ſame medicines in order to his cure, he would take no phyſic at all. It is juſt as wiſe a concluſion as a man ſhould make, that becauſe the philoſophers in Tully's time were divided into above an hundred opinions about that which made a happy life in this world, ſhould therefore determine that there was no ſuch thing as happineſs, and therefore he would not trouble his head about it. But if nothing muſt be believed, if no deſign muſt be purſued, till all men be agreed about it, what propoſition is there that we can have any certainty of, or what project, what buſineſs can we ſafely or reaſonably propoſe to ourſelves to carry on? Is there any truth in the world, tho' never ſo plain, but hath met with oppoſition and contradiction? Have there not been men in the world who have called in queſtion the ſtricteſt mathematical demonſtrations? Are there not yet thoſe in the world who will not allow us in ſome caſes to believe our own ſenſes? If therefore a man muſt ſuſpend his belief of any point, or ſuſpend his action in any matter of buſineſs, till all men have given their opinion in the point the ſame way, he muſt never believe any thing nor do any thing all his life long. God hath furniſhed us with reaſon and underſtanding

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wherewith to examine things, and he hath contrived the world ſo as to let us ſee, that, in moſt caſes, we muſt of neceſſity act upon probable grounds and motives. It is our parts therefore to uſe our reaſon as well as we can, and to act with as much prudence as we can; and if we do this, be it in the choice of our religion, or in any other matter, how different ſoever other mens opinions be, yet we have done well, and God will bleſs the iſſue. And if we had not done thus, but deferred our reſolutions till all men concurred with us, we had plainly been either fools or madmen.

But, ſecondly, From the grounds I have laid down, it appears, that the Romaniſts are every whit as extravagant as the infidels and atheiſts, when they object to us the differences of opinion, and the many diviſions that are among us proteſtants; and would from hence draw an argument to thoſe perſons they tamper with, that our church or our religion cannot be true. But why may we not be in the true church, or have the true religion for all that? Muſt there be always diviſions in the church of Chriſt (as St. Paul ſaith there muſt) and muſt the proteſtants be therefore out of the church, becauſe they have diviſions among them? The papiſts themſelves, how much ſoever they boaſt of their unity, are not without their diviſions, nay, and great ones, and as to ſeveral important points. Nay, farther, I dare affirm, that as to the church of England, there is at this day as much unity among her members, as to all points both of doctrine and worſhip, as there is among the members of any church in the world. So that if this be an argument, it concludes nothing againſt us. But beſides, let the differences of the proteſtants be as wide as you pleaſe, yet I am ſure they do all agree in more than is ſimply neceſſary to be believed in order

to

to ſalvation. Nay, I am ſure, as great as their differences are, they are not greater than thoſe were which happened among the chriſtians in the apoſtles days; and yet for all that, thoſe chriſtians were not unchurched upon account of thoſe differences. The apoſtles ſtill owned them as members of the church of Chriſt: nay, and this too, (which really ought to be conſider'd) tho' they were more inexcuſable for their differences and diviſions than we now are; becauſe they had an infallible authority to reſort to, (*viz.* that of the apoſtles) for the deciding all their controverſies, which we have not. We ſee then how frivolous and unconcluding their way of arguing is. But that which I have now intimated puts me in mind of another thing which it will not be unprofitable upon this occaſion to obſerve; and that is, this very conſideration, that there were ſchiſms, and diviſions, and errors among the chriſtians even in the apoſtles times, would make any reaſonable man believe, that were that true which the Romaniſts pretend, *viz.* that there was, and is, and ſhall be always an infallibility lodged in the chriſtian church; yet even that would not be ſufficient to keep diſputes, and controverſies, and hereſies, and ſchiſms out of the world: for ſtill men would be men; they would have particular humours and paſſions to be gratified; they would have ſenſual ends and intereſts to carry on; and then all this infallibility would ſignify nothing for the ending of controverſies, or preventing ſchiſms or hereſies among chriſtians. For, as I ſaid, ſurely the apoſtles were guided by an infallible ſpirit; and all chriſtians in thoſe times knew them to be ſo; but were not for all this able to put an end to all the controverſies, and hereſies, and diviſions that broke out in the church in their days: no, we have ſufficient evidence

evidence to the contrary: and this very text we are upon, were there no other argument, would make good what I ſay.

The ſecond application which I would make of this point is to ourſelves, who believe and profeſs the reformed religion. It is, you ſee, the pleaſure of God to permit hereſies and ſchiſms in the church for the trial of mens honeſty and ſincerity. And it muſt be owned, that we of this nation have been ſufficiently exerciſed with trials of this kind; eſpecially from a church which, tho' it calls itſelf catholic, is founded in principles the moſt deſtructive of catholic unity, of any communion in Chriſtendom. But, bleſſed be God, we have ſo ſtood theſe trials, that we have no reaſon to be aſhamed, nor have they any great reaſon to boaſt of their victory. We are now, by the good providence of God, in ſuch a poſture, that we hope we ſhall not need to have much apprehenſion of that ſort of trial for the future. But ſtill there is another ſort of trial of this nature that we remain expoſed to; *viz.* the differences and diſſentions among ourſelves; and oh would to God ſome balm could be found for the healing of theſe wounds! Is it not a pity that we who are all of one religion, and do equally profeſs an averſion to the tyranny, and corruptions, and ſuperſtitions of the church of Rome, ſhould yet be at ſuch a diſtance from one another that we cannot worſhip God together? It is true (as I have ſaid) that this is no juſt exception againſt our reformation, but yet it muſt needs be owned that it is a great blemiſh to it. It is true that there will always be hereſies and ſchiſms in the church, and there would be, tho' all proteſtants were united: but yet for all that, it is a great reproach to us that they are not better united. I grant that as to unity

of opinion in all points of religion, the thing is impracticable; for when all is done, men, according to the variety of their parts, and tempers, and educations, muſt of neceſſity think ſeveral ways, and conſequently they will always differ in their notions of things; and there can no more one fix'd meaſure or ſtandard be ſet for mens apprehenſions and judgments, than there can be for their ſtatures and complexions.

But it may be thought, notwithſtanding our little differences in opinion, it is hard we cannot all agree in the common terms of worſhipping God, and partaking of his ſacraments, eſpecially ſince we do all acknowledge that we do agree in more things than are preciſely needful for the carrying us to heaven. Certain it is, nothing is more recommended, nothing is more preſſed in the New-teſtament than this unity and communion among chriſtians. Nay, this very apoſtle who hath told us that there muſt be always hereſies and diviſions in the church, yet is ſo far from countenancing them, that he of all the other ſacred writers is the moſt earneſt and paſſionate in his exhortations to unity, and the moſt ſevere againſt thoſe who cauſe diſſentions, and break the peace of the church. Oh! that God would be pleaſed to affect all thoſe who profeſs his religion in the truth and purity of it, with a deep and lively ſenſe of theſe things; that they would heartily apply themſelves to *follow after the things which make for peace*, (as our apoſtle ſpeaks) that they would *be like-minded, be of one accord, of one ſoul, ſo that the God of peace might be with them!* Ineſtimable indeed are the benefits that would accrue hereby both to the church and ſtate, and to every one of us in particular. By this means we might the more aſſuredly expect the bleſſing of God upon the whole community; becauſe hereby we ſhould

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give the beſt evidence that we are the true *diſciples of his ſon*, in that *we love one another*, and *have peace one with another*. By this means we ſhould remove the ſcandals that our diviſions give to the enemies of our religion; and ſhould diſappoint them of the moſt conſiderable advantages they have againſt us for the making proſelytes to their party. And laſtly, by this means it is to be hoped that our fierce diſputes and contentions about ſmaller things being laid aſide, our zeal and fervour would be employed in things far more momentous; in things wherein the honour of God and the ſalvation of our own ſouls is truly concerned; that is to ſay, in ſeriouſly ſtudying to live well, to be pious, and juſt, and ſober in our converſation; in adorning the doctrine which we profeſs by all the heavenly qualities and good fruit that ſo excellent a religion as ours doth naturally tend to produce in all the believers of it.

SER-

SERMON II.

Some remarkable and important obſervations upon the hiſtory of Cornelius his converſion to the faith.

ACTS X. 4.

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

TO put this text and what I have to ſay upon it, into a due light, it will be neceſſary I ſhould give ſome account of the hiſtory that is related in this chapter. It is the hiſtory of Cornelius his converſion to the chriſtian faith; and a very remarkable one it is.

This Cornelius was captain in the gariſon which the Romans kept at Cæſarea for the better bridling and ſecuring the Jews whom they had conquered. As for his birth, he was not an Iſraelite, but a Roman. As for his religion, he was not a Jew, but a Gentile or Heathen. But yet ſuch an heathen, as had renounced the pagan idolatry, and owned the one ſupreme God, and worſhipped that God in the way that natural reli-

gion taught, tho' not in the way of the Jews. Such men as theſe were by the Jews ſtiled proſelytes of the gate, and many ſuch there were among them.

The character which is here given of him is, that he was *a devout man, and feared God with all his houſe, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God continually*, ver. 2. Here was a worthy heathen ſoldier indeed, and fit to be a pattern not only to all thoſe of his profeſſion amongſt chriſtians, but alſo to all chriſtians of what profeſſion ſoever. He did not only fear God himſelf, but he took care to poſſeſs all his family with the ſame ſenſe of religion; and tho' he did not know the particular way in which God had declared he would be ſerved, yet he did all that he could to recommend himſelf to his favour; and natural reaſon taught him, (as well as the law of the Jews, among whom he might converſe) that if any thing in the world could procure the divine acceptance, it muſt be fervent devotion towards God, and hearty charity towards men; and therefore he laid himſelf out in theſe duties to the utmoſt of his power. And he was not miſtaken in his belief; for ſuch a man as this God would not ſuffer to periſh, but rather than he ſhould want means of information about the right way to everlaſting happineſs, God would ſupply the defects by a miracle. And accordingly the next news we hear is, that when he was at his prayers *about the ninth hour of the day*, ver. 3. (*viz.* our three o'clock in the afternoon, when they offered the evening ſacrifice in the temple) *an angel from heaven* appeared to him, and calling him by his name, ſaid in the words of my text, *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God*, ver. 4. *Now therefore ſend men to* Joppa, *and inquire for one* Simon, *whoſe ſurname is* Peter, ver. 5. *he ſhall tell*

tell thee what thou oughteſt to do, ver. 6. Upon this Cornelius diſpatches away three meſſengers to Joppa, which was about 30 miles diſtant from Cæſarea, where he dwelt, ver. 6—34. On the next day they find St. Peter at his lodging. They acquaint him with their meſſage, and the occaſion of it. He being admoniſhed by the Spirit of God to go with them, prepares for the journey, notwithſtanding the doubts he had whether he, being a Jew, could lawfully converſe with the Gentiles, whom he looked upon as unclean; for God Almighty had removed that ſcruple by a viſion which he had ſent him on that very day. Accordingly on the third day he comes to Cornelius his houſe at Cæſarea. There he finds him and all his friends aſſembled together, waiting for the inſtruction that Peter would give them: and having had an account from Cornelius himſelf of what had happened to him, and of the reaſon why he was ſent for, he then began to diſcourſe to them about our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and the neceſſity of believing on him in order to ſalvation. The particulars of which ſermon you have from the 34th verſe to the 44th. And the effect that it had upon them was this, that as St. Peter was thus diſcourſing to them, *the Holy Ghoſt fell upon all the company*, ver. 44. juſt as he had done on the twelve apoſtles on the day of Pentecoſt; and they all became converts to the chriſtian religion, and were all baptized into it.

This is the ſum of Cornelius his ſtory, as it is related in this chapter; by which you may ſee how my text comes in, and what we are naturally led to obſerve from it. But there are ſuch other uſeful things obſervable from this hiſtory, both with relation to our inſtruction, and to the conduct of our lives, that I think I ought not ſo to confine myſelf to the text, as to paſs them over.

I ſhall therefore lay ſome of theſe obſervations before you, and ſhall in the laſt place conſider what is obſervable from the words of the text.

1. The firſt obſervation I make from this hiſtory is, that we have therein an illuſtrious inſtance of that important truth which it concerns all of us to remember, and often to think of, if we in good earneſt deſign to lead ſuch lives as we ought to do; and that is this, that God is not wanting to any man's ſincere endeavours, but is willing and ready to aſſiſt every one with his grace, and to add further means and helps as there is need of them. Whoever will faithfully do that which he can do towards the ſerving God, tho' that which he can do be but little, ſuch a man ſhall be carried further; and God will take care that at laſt he ſhall be put into ſuch a condition, that he may walk acceptably before him. Cornelius was a ſtranger to the true religion; but ſo far as he knew his duty, he was honeſt and ſincere in doing it. He knew by the light of nature that to pray to God, and to give alms, were probable means of gaining his favour; and therefore he accordingly took theſe methods. This now God accepted; and becauſe of his ſincerity in doing what he could, he vouchſafed his ſpecial grace and aſſiſtance, whereby he was enabled to know, and to do thoſe things which by nature he could not.

I wiſh this example of his was more conſidered and followed; we ſhould not then have ſo many among us, that would live ſo contentedly under the ſlavery of their ſins and vices, upon a pretence that they have not grace and ſtrength enough to overcome them. The great plea that men do generally make for the wickedneſs or careleſſneſs of their lives is this, that really it is not

not in their power to live up to ſuch a rate of holineſs and virtue, as the law of God obligeth them to: grace is in them too weak, and their natural corruptions too ſtrong, for their ever being in a capacity, without more aſſiſtance from God, to live ſtrict and religious lives: converſion is the work of God, and cannot be wrought by a man's ſelf; and therefore till God ſhall pleaſe to come upon them with an irreſiſtible power of his Holy Spirit, they muſt be contented to live as they do; nay, they muſt unavoidably live ſo.

We do readily grant, that without God's grace no man can do any thing; and we grant likewiſe, that it is very probable their circumſtances may be ſuch, that it is not morally poſſible, unleſs they had greater ſtrength and more grace than they have, on a ſudden to live as they ought to do; for their bad principles are really more powerful than their good ones: But yet in the mean time we muſt needs tell them, that they are not mere ſtocks and ſtones. How much reaſon ſoever they have to complain of the infirmity or degeneracy of their natures, yet ſome things they can do towards the bettering of them: for inſtance, tho' they cannot on a ſudden conquer the inward bent and inclination of their minds, ſo as to hate all ſin, and to delight in virtue, yet they muſt needs confeſs that they have a power over their outward actions: they can as well (if they think it reaſonable) direct their feet towards a church, as to a houſe of gaming, or drinking, or lewdneſs: their eyes will ſerve them as well to look upon a bible, or a ſerious diſcourſe about religion, as to read a ſcurrilous and prophane book: It is as much in their power, if they pleaſe, to yield their ears to the reaſonable advice of their ſober friends, as to the mad harangues of the diſſolute company they keep. Theſe

things they muſt needs acknowledge they can do, if they will: nay, and they can do more than this; for if they pleaſe they may give themſelves time to conſider and think of what they read, or what is ſaid to them, or what their own experience or obſervation of things will ſuggeſt to their minds; and they can further, if they pleaſe, add to their conſideration their prayers to Almighty God to direct them, to aſſiſt them, to ſtrengthen them.

Now tho' we grant that all this without God's eſpecial grace will not be effectual for their regeneration and converſion, yet, we ſay, that if they will but do as much as this comes to, we can aſſure them, that in time they ſhall have this eſpecial grace that they now want. In the ſame proportion that they uſe and employ thoſe gifts and powers which they at preſent have, God will increaſe and enlarge them; ſo that what now ſeems impoſſible to them, ſhall in a little time appear poſſible; and what is then but poſſible, ſhall in a little time more look very probable to be done; and what in theſe circumſtances is but a bare probability, ſhall in time be reduced to act; that is, they ſhall at laſt really live as they ſhould do, and be in actual poſſeſſion of that holineſs and virtue, and that acceptance with God, which (as their preſent condition ſtands) they now deſpair of. And the truth of all this is confirmed to us by that memorable aphoriſm of our Saviour, which we find in his mouth at ſeveral times, and upon ſeveral occaſions: *To him that hath, to him ſhall be given, and he ſhall have in abundance; but from him that hath not, ſhall be taken away even that which he hath*, Matt. xxv. 29. The plain ſenſe of which is no other than this, that every one who well huſbands and employs thoſe talents that his lord hath committed to him

him to trade with, (as to every perſon ſome talents are committed, to ſome perſons more, and to others fewer) every one who takes care to employ the gifts and powers he hath received from God to a good end, (be they at firſt never ſo mean and contemptible) ſuch a man ſhall have his ſtock increaſed: tho' he had but a very little at firſt, yet in proportion to his good management, the bounty of his lord ſhall be enlarged to him, till at laſt he ſhall have in abundance: but, on the contrary, every one who hides his talent in a napkin, that lets the powers that God hath given him lie idle and unemployed, that doth not uſe due care and induſtry for the improving of them, *even that which he hath ſhall be taken from him.* God will withdraw all that ſtrength and grace, and all thoſe means and aſſiſtances, that he did at firſt afford to him.

2. A ſecond thing I take notice of in this hiſtory of Cornelius is, that when God had declared by the angel that he ſhould have the goſpel of ſalvation preached to him, there is a particular order given, that he ſhould ſend for Peter to undertake that office. *Send*, ſays he, *to* Joppa, *and call for one* Simon, *ſurnamed* Peter, *he ſhall tell thee what thou oughteſt to do*, ver. 5, 6. Why muſt St. Peter, above all other of the apoſtles, be ſent for to perform this work, and eſpecially when he was at ſo great a diſtance from the place? That which I obſerve from hence is this, that this circumſtance gives us a clear account of the true meaning of that promiſe which our Saviour made to St. Peter, upon his having made a public declaration, that Jeſus was the Chriſt the Son of God: *I ſay unto thee, that thou art* Peter, *and upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt it*, Matt. 16, 18. *And*

I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, ver. 19. The papiſts make a world ado with this paſſage, and becauſe the keys of the kingdom of heaven are here ſo particularly made over to St. Peter, they from hence conclude, that he was made head of the church, and inveſted with a ſuperiority and juriſdiction over the reſt of the apoſtles, and conſequently that his ſucceſſors, the popes of Rome, have the ſupreme government of the chriſtian world. But if we will well conſider this hiſtory of Cornelius, and join to it what is reported to us in the 2d chapter of the Acts, where the ſtory is told us of St. Peter's preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecoſt, we ſhall be fully ſatisfied, that it was quite another privilege than the headſhip of the catholic church that was promiſed to St. Peter in thoſe words of our Saviour.

The kingdom of heaven (of which our Lord then promiſed him the keys) is undoubtedly to be underſtood of the kingdom of Chriſt in the world, *viz. that church* which Chriſt there ſaid *he would build, and againſt which the gates of hell ſhould not prevail.* By the keys of this kingdom, muſt undoubtedly be underſtood the power of admitting perſons into this church, and ſhutting them out of it; for to what other uſe doth a key ſerve, but to open and ſhut a lock? Now theſe keys, tho' they were afterwards given to all the apoſtles, and to their ſucceſſors, yet they are here promiſed to St. Peter in particular, and by name; and that, as we grant, for a reward of his ſo clear and noble a confeſſion of Chriſt Jeſus: and we make no doubt neither but that in this promiſe there was a particular privilege conferred upon him, that was not upon the reſt of the apoſtles. All this we grant. But now what was this privilege? Was it that he ſhould be the prince

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of the apoſtles, and his ſucceſſors lords of the world? No ſuch matter. But only this, that St. Peter, for his generous acknowledgment of our Lord, ſhould have the honour, by his preaching, to open the kingdom of heaven both to the Jews and to the Gentiles; and accordingly we find that God made good this promiſe to him in both theſe inſtances: for to the Jews he opened the kingdom of heaven upon the day of Pentecoſt, that very day on which the Holy Ghoſt deſcended upon the apoſtles in a viſible manner. Then did Peter, being filled with the Spirit, preach ſo effectually to the Jews there aſſembled, that 3000 of them were by that ſermon brought into the church. And now here again, when God thinks fit that the doors of the kingdom of heaven ſhould be opened to the Gentiles, who is to be employed upon that work, but the ſame St. Peter to whom our Lord had given the keys? It is expreſly ordered by the angel, that he, and no other, ſhould be ſent for to preach the goſpel to Cornelius, and that by his means the Gentiles ſhould be made believers, and admitted into the church of Chriſt. And thus did St. Peter exerciſe his power of the keys in opening the kingdom of heaven, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles: and thus did Chriſt, in a remarkable manner, make good that which he had ſo particularly promiſed him. But what is this to St. Peter's being head of the apoſtles, or the pope of Rome being the head of the catholic church?

3. A third obſervation I make from this hiſtory of Cornelius is this, that it is not enough to entile any man to everlaſting ſalvation, that he practiſeth the duties of natural religion, unleſs he alſo believe and embrace that religion which God has revealed by Jeſus

Chriſt, ſuppoſing he has opportunities of coming to the knowledge of it. Cornelius, of whom we are treating, was certainly, as far as natural religion could carry a man, as devout and honeſt a perſon, and as acceptable to God upon that account, as any we can imagine: and God did ſo far accept him, as to ſend an angel in pure kindneſs to him. But then this angel's meſſage to him, was not that God did very well approve of the way that he was in, and that he needed not trouble himſelf farther; but this, that he had done well for a man in his circumſtances, but if he would farther recommend himſelf to God, and ſave his ſoul, he muſt ſend for one Peter from Joppa to inſtruct him in the chriſtian religion. But if now, upon his ſending for Peter, and hearing what he had to ſay concerning Chriſt, he had ſtill continued an unbeliever, or a heathen, would God then have continued to accept him? No, by no means; he had ſhewed himſelf unworthy of God's favour, nor could he in the leaſt expect the reward of an honeſt and religious man.

The inference I make from hence is this, That bare morality or honeſty of life, without a right faith, will not ſave a man's ſoul, ſuppoſing that the man hath opportunities of coming to the knowledge of that right faith, as Cornelius here had. And this conſideration I ſeriouſly addreſs to all thoſe among us, who think it ſo indifferent a matter what religion or what faith they are of, provided they are but honeſt in their lives. They think that nothing offends God but the open violation of thoſe rules of morality which all the world muſt acknowledge themſelves obliged to obſerve, and which it is ſcandalous not to obſerve. So that it is all one to a man's ſalvation, whether he be Turk, or Jew, or heathen, or chriſtian, ſuppoſing he be but devout

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in his way, and have a regard in his dealings with others to the practice of that which is accounted fair, juſt, and honourable amongſt men. But this is a grievous miſtake, and of moſt pernicious conſequence. It is certain, that wherever God has revealed his will, and declared upon what terms he will beſtow ſalvation upon mankind, there all men are, under pain of damnation, obliged to embrace his revelation, and to believe, and profeſs, and practiſe according to the doctrines of ſuch revelation. And it is certain likewiſe, that God hath fully and entirely revealed his will by Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles in the New-teſtament; and ſo revealed it, as to exclude all men from the hopes of ſalvation, who, having opportunity of knowing Jeſus Chriſt and his doctrines, do not believe in him. And therefore for any man to reject this method of God, and to ſay, I hope to be ſaved by another way than God hath appointed, is the extreameſt folly in the world: let every one therefore among us, as they would not be undone to all eternity, endeavour to inſtruct themſelves aright in the true religion. All their pretended moral honeſty will not in the leaſt excuſe them before God, if, when having means to find the truth, they do not embrace it, but continue infidels or miſbelievers. If they had been born and bred in an heathen country, where they had no opportunity of coming to the knowledge of God's revealed will, I know not how far their juſtice and temperance, and other good moral qualities, might avail them towards the procuring God's acceptance. But to live in a chriſtian country, nay, and to be baptiſed into Chriſt's religion, and yet to be pagans as to their notions and opinions; not to believe in Jeſus Chriſt, but to think to pleaſe God in the way of the philoſophers; there is

nothing

nothing in the world to be ſaid in their excuſe for this. And they will at laſt find true what our Saviour hath pronounced, that *this is their condemnation* (and a heavy one it will be) *that light is come into the world, but they have loved darkneſs rather than light*, John iii. 19.

4. The fourth obſervation I make upon this hiſtory is, That God, even in the extraordinary expreſſions of his kindneſs to ſinners, in ſuch caſes where he is pleaſed to work a man's converſion in a miraculous way, yet hath ſuch a regard to the ſtanding ordinary means of grace, as even in theſe caſes to make uſe of them for bringing his work about. Rather than Cornelius ſhould continue an infidel or ſtranger to the true religion, God was here pleaſed to ſend an angel from heaven to direct him to the right faith and belief: this was wholly extraordinary and miraculous. Now it is worthy of our obſervation, that this angel doth not take upon him to inſtruct Cornelius in the chriſtian religion, and to teach him what he was to believe concerning Jeſus Chriſt, and what he was to practiſe if he would have eternal life; (tho' certainly he could very well and very eaſily have done it) no; but for this he refers him to St. Peter, one of the ſtanding public miniſters of the goſpel. *Send*, ſays he, *for one Simon ſurnamed Peter; he ſhall inſtruct thee what thou ſhalt do*, ver. 6. And thus it was alſo in the caſe of St. Paul, who was another remarkable inſtance of a miraculous and extraordinary converſion, and in many reſpects a greater inſtance than that we have now before us. For to him God did not ſend an angel, as he did to Cornelius, but our Lord Jeſus Chriſt himſelf vouchſafed to appear to him, and that in the moſt glorious and aſtoniſh-

aſtoniſhing manner that could be imagined. But what then? Did our Lord inſtruct him in the religion he was to believe? Did he make him a chriſtian? No, not at all. All that he did was to make him ſenſible of his error in oppoſing and perſecuting the chriſtian faith; but for inſtruction and information in that faith he referr'd him to a public miniſter of the goſpel. The ſcriptures tell us, that when St. Paul, trembling and aſtoniſhed, ſaid, *Lord, what wouldeſt thou have me to do*, Acts ix. 6. The anſwer that our Saviour gave him was not, I will tell thee; but this, *Ariſe and go into the city, and it ſhall be told thee what thou ſhalt do.* And accordingly he was no ſooner come into the city, but Ananias a chriſtian miniſter was ordered to go and wait upon him, and to inſtruct him in the faith, and to make a chriſtian of him by baptiſm. Theſe are illuſtrious expreſſions of the great value that God ſets upon the ordinary public means which he hath appointed in the church, for the bringing men to holineſs and happineſs. And they are ſtrong proofs of the obligation that is upon every perſon to make uſe of thoſe means, let their circumſtances be what they will. And therefore let every man as he loves his ſoul have a care of diſuſing them, have a care of withdrawing from them, and moſt of all have a care of deſpiſing them, upon a pretence that he is above ordinances, and that he is too perfect a chriſtian to have need of ſuch carnal adminiſtrations. He who thinks to be a good chriſtian, and to live acceptably to God merely by the ſtrength and virtue of his own private devotions, or reading, or meditation, or upon the account of any ſecret inſpiration, or impulſes, or revelations, while in the mean time he makes no reckoning of God's ſtanding ordinances, refuſes his communion with the

church,

church, and lives without public prayers and ſacraments, as thinking them empty formalities, ſuch a man is horribly cheated and abuſed, and will find at laſt that he extreamly wrongs his own ſoul; becauſe he doth really put himſelf out of the common way of God's bleſſing. He will not be content to receive the divine influences thro' ſuch conduits and channels as God hath ordered they ſhould be conveyed thro', but he will have a way of his own, which God hath no where promiſed that he will bleſs; but, on the contrary, has given us great reaſon to believe that he will not bleſs.

5. The fifth and laſt obſevation that I make from this hiſtory is, that which the text itſelf ſuggeſteth to us; *viz.* the wonderful efficacy of prayers and alms to recommend us to the favour of God. Cornelius, as I have before ſaid, was, without doubt, as to all the inſtances of his converſation, an honeſt and a good man, as far as he knew. But that which God principally takes notice of in him, and rewards him for, was his conſtant praying, and his great bounty and charity. Certain it is, the angel who was ſent to him mentions no other of his virtues but theſe two. *Cornelius*, ſays he, *thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.* Come up for a memorial before God,—what is that? Why it is a phraſe juſt of the ſame importance as if he had ſaid, Thy prayers and thine alms are an offering of a ſweet-ſmelling ſavour unto God. Both the phraſes are frequently uſed in the ſcripture, and they both mean the ſame thing. And indeed St. Peter in the very beginning of his ſermon ſeems to take notice of theſe two virtues in Cornelius, (*viz.* devotion and charity) as well as the angel; nay, and

and from hence draws a general concluſion; *I perceive*, ſays he, *that God is no reſpecter of perſons; but in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteouſneſs is accepted of him*, ver. 34, 35. That is to ſay, in every nation he that is heartily devout towards God, and charitable towards men, (for to work righteouſneſs is generally the ſcripture phraſe to expreſs the exerciſing of mercy and charity) every ſuch perſon is accepted of God. Oh that we would all ſeriouſly think of this, and practiſe it; if we did, we ſhould certainly take the beſt courſe in the world to draw down the bleſſings of God upon us, both thoſe of this world, and of the other. Frequent, and conſtant, and devout prayer hath ſo many promiſes made to it, both in the Old-teſtament and in the new, that no man who reads and believes the ſcriptures can poſſibly doubt, but that he who uſeth it ſhall certainly be heard in what he prays for; or if God do not grant his prayers in the particular inſtances that the man deſires, yet he will ſo far grant them as to give him ſuch things as are much better for him. And as for alms and charity, they are always deſcribed in ſcripture as the moſt acceptable ſacrifice we can offer to God, and the moſt effectual means we can make uſe of for the averting the puniſhment of our ſins, and the procuring to us the mercies and bleſſings that we ſtand in need of. *To do good and to communicate*, ſays St. Paul, *forget not, for with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed*, Heb. xiii. 16. And *above all things*, ſays St. Peter, *put on charity, for charity ſhall cover a multitude of ſins*, 1 Pet. iv. 8. And the ſame advice doth the prophet Daniel give to Nebuchadnezzar for the covering the multitude of his ſins; *Let my counſel*, ſays he, Dan. iv. 27. *O king, be acceptable to thee, break off thy ſins by righteouſneſs*, (that is, by giving alms,

alms, as I ſaid before) *and thine iniquities by ſhewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.* In ſhort, ſuch is the efficacy of conſtant prayer and charity, ſuch a regard hath God to theſe two things, that whoſoever doth ſeriouſly and conſcientiouſly practiſe them, he will be accepted of God. If he be now a bad man, it will be impoſſible for him to continue ſo long; for God will ſo aſſiſt him, ſo ſtrengthen him, ſo enlighten him, that he ſhall at laſt become a convert to true virtue and religion. And if he be a good man already, he takes the moſt effectual courſe in the world every day to grow better and better, ſo that he will *go from ſtrength to ſtrength*, till *at laſt he will appear before God in the heavenly Sion.*

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SERMON III.

The Prodigal Son. The true and miſerable ſtate of ſinners. Conſideration uſually the firſt ſtep to repentance.

LUKE xv. 17, 18.

And when he came to himſelf, he ſaid, How many hired ſervants of my father have bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger! I will ariſe and go to my father.

THESE words are a part of our Saviour's famous parable of the prodigal ſon, in which many excellent things are delivered for the inſtruction, and direction, and encouragement of all penitent ſinners.

Two things may be obſerved in theſe words. Firſt, The miſerable condition which the prodigal had brought himſelf into by his evil courſes. *How many hired ſervants*, ſays he, *of my father have bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger!*

Secondly,

Secondly, His resolution to return to his father, which followed upon the sense and consideration of this. *When he came to himself*, and consider'd this, he said, *I will arise and go to my father*, &c.

Under the first of these heads I shall make it my business to lay before you the true state of sinners and wicked men, who are the persons signified by the prodigal; and that both as to the steps by which they proceed in sin, and as to the wretched circumstances they bring themselves into thereby.

Under the second head I shall treat of the method by which sinners are brought to repentance: The first step of which is a coming to themselves, as it is here expressed; that is, entering into a deep and serious consideration of their own state and concernments.

I. I begin with the prodigal's evil courses and misery.

Now that you may the better go along with me in this, it is fit I read to you the beginning of the parable, wherein a more particular account is given of the prodigal, both as to his sin and his misery. *A certain man*, says our Lord, *had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself*, &c. ver. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

By

By the father here, who had two ſons, to whom he gave portions out of his eſtate, we are to underſtand God Almighty the great Father and Lord of the world, who, out of his abundance, doth beſtow upon mankind, who are his offspring, their ſeveral portions. There is not one of his children but has a plentiful proviſion made for him, and variety of talents committed to him; which if he do but carefully manage and improve to the uſes they were given for, he will for ever preſerve to himſelf the love, and favour, and kindneſs of his heavenly Father, and ſhall not fail both of living happily and comfortably here, and arriving alſo to a glorious ſtate of immortality hereafter.

By the two ſons here mentioned, between whom the father did divide the inheritance, we are to underſtand the two different ſorts of men in the world. In the character of the eldeſt ſon are repreſented thoſe men, who being bleſſed with a good temper and virtuous inclinations, and lighting under a careful education, have in a great meaſure preſerved their innocency all their lives; have never wander'd away from their father's houſe; never gone aſtray in the paths of vice and wickedneſs; but, as the elder ſon ſaith of himſelf, have *for many years ſerved* their heavenly Father without any wilful or habitual *tranſgreſſion of his commandment*, ver. 29.

In the character of the younger ſon, who is the prodigal, are repreſented all thoſe men who abuſe the talents he hath committed to them, the benefits, and helps, and powers which he has beſtowed upon them, to evil and miſchievous purpoſes; who forſake the guidance and conduct of their heavenly Father, and betake themſelves to a courſe of vice and ſenſuality: In a word, all ſorts of men that have ever lived looſely and wicked-

wickedly, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. These are the prodigals here mentioned; and it was for their encouragement to repent, and for their comfort if they do so, that this parable was framed by our Saviour.

Now in this account which is here given us of the prodigal's evil courses, and the consequences of them, we have a lively description of the state of sinners; the methods and steps by which they proceed in sin, and the wretched condition they are thereby brought into; as will appear by comparing one with the other in the following particulars:

1. In the first place, The younger son having got his portion into his own hands, cares no longer to be in his father's house, thinking that there his liberty is too much abridged: but that he might the more effectually free himself from all sorts of check or restraint, that the awe of his father might put upon him, he gets him into a foreign country. And thus doth it fare with sinners: the first step of their miscarriage is their estranging themselves from their heavenly father. They think it too severe a discipline to live always under the apprehensions and awe of an invisible being. And therefore they put the thoughts of God out of their heads as much as they can. They say unto him with the profane people in Job, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*, chap. xxi. 14. It is true, wherever they are, or whatever they do, God is present with them, whether they will or no; for there *is no going from his spirit, no flying from his presence*, Ps. cxxxix. 6. But they may be properly enough said to depart from God, or to go afar off from him, while they do not consider or regard him; while they cease to maintain a constant sense of his justice, and goodness, and providence in their own minds;

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while they lay aside the care of his worship, and neglect their prayers and other holy exercises; and, in a word, live at that rate, as if they were not apprehensive that there is an intelligent, omnipotent being, who governs the world, and to whom they are accountable.

2. But to go on. The prodigal having got into another country, and so far enough from the sight of his father, allows himself all the liberties that his heart can desire; lives viciously and profusely, and so in a little time spends that stock which his father had given him. And so it is likewise with the sinner (who answers to him) when once he has cast off the fear of God, and cashiered the sense of religion out of his mind, (which is the best security of mens innocency, and the most effectual curb to keep them from going astray) he presently flies out into all sorts of extravagancy and debauchery, as his temper and inclination does prompt him. He gives the reins to every appetite and to every passion, and takes his full swing of unlawful liberties and gratifications, according as his humour stands, or temptations do present themselves. And by this means he does in a little time waste those talents which God had committed to him. He besots his understanding, he depraves and corrupts his will, he weakens all his spiritual powers, he hardens his conscience, and thereby loses that quick apprehension and sense of good and evil that was put into his mind; he squanders away his time and opportunities, he renders himself incapable of the benefits and advantages, which, if he be a person above the common rank, his birth, and education, and circumstances in the world gave him for the purposes of virtue. He loses the present assistances of the divine grace, and forfeits his title

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to it for the future: in a word, he embezzles and consumes all that ſtock, of what nature ſoever it was, which God beſtowed upon him for the living reaſonably, and piouſly, and happily either in this world or in the other.

3. But further; The prodigal having thus ſpent his portion by his profuſe way of living, is now, by reaſon of the extremity of want that is fallen upon him, forced to become a ſervant. And this is the true condition of a ſinner. The man who lives in the conſtant gratification of his luſts and appetites, of what nature ſoever they be, how free ſoever God made him, yet by thus weakening and abuſing his higher powers, and not giving check to his inferior appetites, he is in a little time reduced to the abject condition of a ſervant or bondman. They who give themſelves to commit ſin *are the ſervants of ſin.* He that is entangled in an habit of vice and wickedneſs is no longer at his own diſpoſal, but his luſts do drag him and hurry him whitherſoever they will: reaſon is dethroned, and the brutiſh part of the man doth rule and domineer. A rabble of wild paſſions, blind as chance itſelf, and violent and impetuous like the raging ſea, do force this poor image of a man to do and to ſuffer things even oftentimes againſt his own ſenſe and judgment. Tho' he hath ſo much reaſon left as in many caſes to apprehend what is good and deſirable, yet he hath no power to purſue it: and that evil which in his own conſcience he diſapproves of, ſuch a ſlave he is to his appetites, that he cannot forbear it. And as it is not to one lord only that he is a ſervant, but to a hundred; ſo, which makes the ſervitude ſtill more intolerable, thoſe ſeveral tyrants cannot agree among themſelves, but impoſe laws upon the poor man contradictory to, and inconſiſtent

iſtent with one another. Luſt commands one thing; ambition another; covetouſneſs another; fear another; ome of them the man muſt obey: and yet which ſo-ever of them he doth obey, the reſt are angry, and liſpleaſed that themſelves are not gratified. In one hing indeed they do all agree and conſpire, (but it is ſtill to make him the more wretched bondman) *viz.* hat they all promote and help forwards, in their ſeve-ral ways, the rule and intereſt of the great enemy of mankind, the devil; for he indeed is the ſupreme lord of them all, and it is his work and drudgery chiefly that a man is doing all the while that he is purſuing the gratifications of his appetites. So that he may moſt properly be ſaid to be the ſlave of the devil, as well as his own luſts; which certainly is the moſt miſerable bondage in the world. This is indeed the ſcripture account of this matter: *Whoſoever*, ſays St. John, *committeth ſin is of the devil*, 1 John iii. 8. and ſuch perſons are by St. Paul ſaid to *be taken in the ſnare of the devil, and to be led captive by him at his will* and pleaſure, 2 Tim. ii. 26.

4. Again; The prodigal having thus of a freeman made himſelf a ſervant, ſee how wretchedly and baſely he is uſed: he is put to the meaneſt and moſt contemptible employment, even to feed ſwine: and his diet was no better than his employment, for he is forced to eat of the huſks that are given to the hogs.

But juſt thus are all they uſed who give themſelves up to a vicious life. God deſigned them for noble employments, and ſo long as they preſerved their innocence, and kept themſelves under their father's wing, and in his fear and obedience, they lived like the *children of the Moſt High*. Their work was ſuitable to their dignity, and becoming ſuch excellent natures as

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God had given them. Their buſineſs was to contemplate God and his works, and to exerciſe their reaſons about the beſt and the nobleſt ſubjects; to ſing praiſes to him who was the author of their being, and to employ all their faculties in the moſt manly way; to love and to do good to all their fellow creatures, as they had opportunity, which is a godlike part; to govern their inferior appetites, and keep them conſtantly in ſubjection to the higher ſpirit that was in them; ſo that reaſon and the divine principle ſat as empreſs in the ſoul, and all the ſenſitive paſſions moved orderly, regularly, and harmoniouſly, contributing with all chearfulneſs their ſervice and aſſiſtance to the man, for the carrying on the purpoſes of his noble function. This was the employment that our heavenly Father deſigned us for; and this is the employment that all virtuous perſons, all they who live up to the dignity of their nature, do ſtill follow. But oh! what a ſtrange change is there made when a man departs from God, and yields up himſelf to the ſervice of his luſts! What an infamous drudgery is he put upon! What mean ſervile offices does he buſy himſelf about! Certainly without a figure we may ſay, that the keeping of ſwine with the prodigal is a more truly honourable employment than that which ſinners do chuſe for themſelves. What can be more baſe and vile than for immortal ſouls, made for the fruition of the higheſt good, deſigned for the ſociety of angels, and God himſelf, to ſpend day after day, year after year, either in a dull lethargic doſedneſs and ſtupidity, inſenſible of all things, and minding nothing but eating, and ſleeping, and playing! Or in ſcraping together a little heap of finely colour'd dirt, which in a little time will moulder away, if not in their own hands, yet in the hands of

thoſe they leave it to! Or in wallowing in the filthy puddles of uncleanneſs and luſt, which ſeldom fail to end in beggary, or ſhame, or rottenneſs! Or in uſing their bodies as they do the veſſels in their cellars, merely for the ſtowage of drink, till there be nothing but the ſhape of man remaining! Or laſtly, like children eagerly blowing up and toſſing a painted bubble, and ſtriving to keep it above ground, which yet the leaſt puff of wind makes to vaniſh into air! And yet theſe are the principal employments in which vicious men do buſy themſelves. Theſe are the things they live for, and beyond which they have no thought or ambition. *Whatever is in the world* (as the apoſtle tells us) is either *the luſt of the fleſh*, or *the luſt of the eye*, or *the pride of life*, 1 John ii. 16. Senſual pleaſures on one hand, and wealth on another, and popular applauſe or greatneſs on another, are the three great idols of the world; and whoever forſakes his God doth fall down and worſhip one or more of them. But are not theſe pitiful and contemptible deities for a rational heaven-born ſoul to proſtrate itſelf before? Is it not a ſhameful proſtitution of our natures, to make thoſe the great objects of our fears, and of our hopes, of our love and of our joy, and in a word, of all the deſigns, and ſtudies, and purſuits of our lives? Oh the horrible blindneſs and degeneracy of mankind! What mean deſpicable creatures do we make ourſelves, when we forſake the paths of virtue and the commandments of our God! Alas, we ceaſe to be men, and put ourſelves upon the ſame level with the brutes; nay, which is yet worſe, to uſe the prophet's expreſſion, it may be truly ſaid of us, that *we debaſe ourſelves even to hell.* Iſa. lvii. 9.

And indeed ſuitable to the employment of a vicious man, is the fare that he lives upon. As his courſe of life is not more honourable than the feeding of ſwine, ſo neither are his enjoyments better than thoſe of the prodigal. His deſign is to live at eaſe, free from care and trouble; to revel it in ſenſual delights, or to pleaſe himſelf with the outward ſplendor of his condition. But, alas! he fails of his deſires and expectations in all theſe things. Such is the contrivance of things, that it is impoſſible that a vicious man ſhould live happily, or ſatisfy his own mind, let his circumſtances be never ſo proſperous. Inſtead of ſolid manly food, he only feeds upon huſks, which neither gratify a human palate, nor afford him good nouriſhment. The mind of man is of that nature, that it can never be adequately filled, and contented with any outward good, and leaſt of all with thoſe goods which are enjoyed in a vicious unreaſonable manner. Solomon, who made more experiments of this kind than any man perhaps upon earth, yet found at laſt to his coſt, that all thoſe kinds of ſatisfactions were but mere vanity and vexation of ſpirit. All the pleaſures which the ſinner can receive from the moſt careful gratification of his ſenſual appetites, are but of the very ſame kind with thoſe that his hogs are capable of as well as he; only with this difference, that their enjoyments are more affecting and leſs allayed with bitterneſs than his are. And can that be the happineſs of a man, which the moſt ſtupid creature in the world has as great a ſhare of as he himſelf?

But beſides, ſo far are our vicious gratifications from being pleaſures properly ſo called, that one may with truth enough affirm, that, take them altogether, they have far more of uneaſineſs and trouble in them than

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of delight and ſatisfaction. All ſorts of ſinners, all who are under the power and dominion of their luſts, do know and feel this: the covetous, the proud, the envious, the glutton, the drunkard, the whoremonger, the ambitious, the revengeful; all theſe can teſtify out of their own ſad experience, that when they have ſumm'd up the matter, the contentment they receive from the gratification of theſe ſeveral paſſions or appetites doth no ways countervail the pains and reſtleſsneſs, the diſturbances and diſappointments, and the manifold evil conſequences both as to their bodies and ſouls, and good names, and eſtates, which they ſuffer upon the account of them.

5. But to come to the laſt circumſtance of the prodigal's condition, which the parable mentions: As coarſe and as unagreeable fare as the huſks were, yet he would have been glad to have ſatisfied his hunger even with theſe; but thus much was denied him. The text tells us, *he would fain have filled his belly with the huſks which the ſwine did eat, but no man gave them unto him.* Oh! wretched unhappy man! he who before pamper'd himſelf with all ſorts of delicacies, even to ſurfeiting, would now be glad of any ſort of food in the world, even of huſks, if he could get them. But ſo cruel is the maſter he ſerves, that he will not ſuffer him to fill his belly even with theſe.

Now in this alſo we have a lively repreſentation of the ſtate and condition of the ſpiritual prodigal: juſt thus doth the devil treat all thoſe who abandon God and virtue, to ſerve him and their own luſts. The beſt wages they have, is only a little ſenſual pleaſure, or a little empty honour and greatneſs, which are but huſks in compariſon of the noble entertainments of religion and a good conſcience. But even theſe they cannot

have their fill of; for, alas! they are obnoxious to a thouſand contingencies, which do either rob us of them, or put a period to all the delight and comfort we ſhould receive by them. They are in a very little time either taken from the man, or the man from them. How can he be ſaid to have his fill of wealth, who is either always craving and drudging for more, or anxiouſly fearful to loſe what he hath? And who, notwithſtanding *the fulneſs of his barns*, and the largeneſs of his poſſeſſions, and when he ſhould *ſay to himſelf, ſoul, eat and drink and be merry*, Luke xii. 19, 20. *for thou haſt goods laid up for many years*, ſhall hear one of theſe two voices, *Thou fool, this night ſhall thy* goods *be taken from thee*, or, which is worſe, *Thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be taken from thee, and then whoſe will all theſe things be?* And is there any greater hopes for the ambitious, that they ſhall have their fill of what their ſouls moſt deſire? Alas! no. As eaſily may they make the wind to blow always in one quarter, or keep the ſea from its conſtant ebbings and flowings, as they can ſecure to themſelves the uncertain favour of great men, or the more uncertain breath of the people. And as for bodily pleaſures, what do the moſt delicious of them ſignify, when the appetites to them are decayed and periſhed? as certainly they will be, when the vigour and briſkneſs of a man's conſtitution wears off, and the powers of nature grow feeble and languid; which old age will undoubtedly bring to paſs, but moſt frequently riots and debauches do the buſineſs before that comes. But beſides all this that I have ſaid, how is it poſſible for a ſinner to have his fill of any of theſe things? Or what comfort, what ſatisfaction can any of them afford him under a multitude of other unfortunate afflicting circumſtances, which

which he is unavoidably expoſed to? Can he ſay, I will refreſh myſelf with play, or wine, or muſic, when he lies languiſhing on a ſick bed? Or will his heaps of treaſure charm the gout, or ſtone, or cholic, that they ſhall put him to no pain? Or can he take any ſatisfaction from the cringes of the people, or the compliments of his friends, when his mind is ruffled with a great many ſecret and almoſt heart-breaking diſappointments? Or laſtly, can all theſe things together yield any balm for the healing an ulcerated conſcience, which in the midſt of the greateſt affluence, the moſt luxurious entertainments, the moſt pleaſing flatteries and applauſes, makes the vicious man to tremble and look pale with the bitter reflections of his life paſt, and the diſmal proſpect he has of what is to come? Alas! in none of theſe caſes can he purchaſe any quiet or repoſe to his own mind from the poſſeſſion of any of theſe things, which the world calls great and happy. He is not at all the better for them, becauſe he is out of the capacity of enjoying them: he feels no reliſh or guſto in them. And indeed in theſe circumſtances it is all one whether he hath them or be without them. But ſuppoſing he was in a condition at all times as long as he lives uninterruptedly to fill and ſatisfy his appetites with theſe things, without the diſturbance of ſickneſs, of afflictions, of diſappointments, and, which is worſt of all, of a guilty conſcience, (which yet in the nature of things is impoſſible) yet this miſery will ſtill attend him, he cannot enjoy theſe things always. The time is coming on apace when he muſt part with all theſe, his friends, and comforters; the ſhadows of the evening will in a little time be ſtretched out upon him, and he muſt go into the regions of death; and then he muſt bid an everlaſting farewel to the light of

his eyes, to the desire of his soul, and to the idols of his life; and when this is a coming upon him, he will feel a sore want indeed. Then he will sadly say, with the prodigal, *How many hired servants are there in my father's house, that have bread enough*; *but* lo! *I perish with hunger*. He calls for his pleasures; but they are all departed, gone as a dream when one awaketh. He calls for his wealth, which, with so much anxiety and toil, he hath amassed together; but that is upon the wing, to fly to a new heir, that will perchance spend it more profusely, than he got it sordidly: and all his gay feathers, in which he prided himself, and with which he endeavour'd to sore above others, are now pluck'd from him, and he is left the most naked, despicable thing in the whole world. He hath nothing in the earth to turn himself to in this extremity; which way soever he casts his eyes, he sees nothing but what will fill him with horror. If he looks inwards, there all is hell, and despair, and confusion; there he finds a soul all over foul and leprous, oppressed with intolerable loads of the blackest guilt, and filled with the remembrance of a thousand instances of folly and baseness, and the ugliest ingratitude. If he looks about him, he sees all his friends and companions taking their last leave of him, and as they forsake him, his great master, the devil, with his frightful guard about him (whose interest he hath so faithfully pursued, and whose drudgery he hath been doing all his life) ready to claim their own, and seize upon the trembling soul, as it parts from the body. Lastly, if he looks upwards, he sees an angry offended God, whose laws he hath affronted, whose threatnings he hath despised, whose grace he hath turned into wantonness, and whose holy Spirit he hath done despite to. He sees the judge of

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the world ſummoning him to appear at his dreadful tribunal, to give an account of all the talents he hath miſemployed, of all the precious time he hath miſ-ſpent, of all the riots and debauches, all the frauds and unjuſt dealings, all the oaths and blaſphemies, all the lewd intrigues; and, in a word, all the wicked deſigns and prophane words, and evil actions of his whole life: and he ſeems to hear that terrible ſentence ſounding in his ears, which will moſt certainly be pronounced upon him, and all ſuch as he is, at the laſt day. *Go, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*, Matt. xxv. 41. Oh, miſerable ſtate! oh, diſmal concluſion of a ſinful life! But theſe are the natural fruits and conſequences of forſaking God, and giving ourſelves over to a courſe of vice and impiety. Nor is there any poſſibility of preventing or averting thoſe conſequences, unleſs, with the prodigal in the text, we do in time *come to ourſelves*, and enter into a ſerious conſideration of our ways, and upon that conſideration *ariſe and go to our father.*

II. Which leads me to the ſecond head of my diſcourſe, which is the prodigal's return, as it is expreſſed in my text; of which I ſhall diſcourſe very briefly, becauſe I have ſpent ſo much time upon the former.

The account that is given of the prodigal's return, is this, that *when he came to himſelf, he ſaid, How many hired ſervants of my father have bread enough, and I periſh with hunger? I will ariſe, and go to my father.* Here now, I ſay, we have a lively repreſentation of the beginning and progreſs of repentance after a vicious life.

The prodigal being now pinched with extremity of want, comes at laſt to himſelf: he begins to look about him, and to weigh and debate things ſeriouſly in

his own mind. Whilſt he was in the height of his proſperity, he drove on furiouſly, not attending to any thing but the purſuit of his riots and debauches: he ſeem'd to live without thinking, without any kind of reflection, either upon what was paſſed, or what was to come; he was as one that was doſed with wine, or delirious with a fever. Indeed he could not properly be ſaid to be in his wits: but the miſerable circumſtances of his condition do at laſt awaken him, and bring him to his right ſenſes; and then he begins to deliberate and make uſe of his reaſon. He then enters into a ſad conſideration of the happineſs he hath loſt, and the wretched condition he is in, and his own folly that brought him into it, and what it muſt end in, if there was not ſome ſpeedy courſe taken, ſome preſent means uſed for the getting out of it. And this conſideration puts him at leaſt upon ſerious reſolutions to apply himſelf to his father, as the only refuge that was left him in this world.

And thus it fares with every ſpiritual prodigal, who, after a vicious courſe of life, doth at laſt return to his duty. The firſt ſtep of his repentance is a ſerious ſenſe of his condition. Till he begins to think, and reflect, and conſider, there are no hopes of him; but when thro' ſome good providence or other (either a fit of ſickneſs, or ſome other ſharp affliction, or the arguments and intreaties of his friends, or ſome viſible judgment of God inflicted upon the companions of his riotous courſes, or the reading ſome good book, or the hearing ſome warm diſcourſe;) I ſay, when by any of theſe, or ſuch other methods (which God uſually makes uſe of for the awakening of ſinners) he is brought to a ſenſe of his condition, begins to cool, and in good earneſt to lay things to heart, and debate matters

ters ſeriouſly with himſelf; then he gives ſome appearances of a probability, that he may, in time, reſcue himſelf from the bondage of his luſts, and the ſnares of the devil, and become a convert to virtue and piety.

Here therefore all of us who have gone aſtray with the prodigal, but have not yet returned with him; here, I ſay, we are to lay the foundation of repentance, *viz.* in deep and ſerious conſideration: and I would to God we would all do it preſently, that we would ſtop our cariere a little time, and give ourſelves leave to think; that we would no longer blindly and furiouſly purſue our appetites, but open our eyes a little, and awake from our frenzy or our lethargy. Oh! that we would at laſt come to ourſelves, as the prodigal did, and reſume the exerciſe of our long abandoned reaſon; that we would do as David adviſeth, *Stand in awe, and commune with our own hearts, and in our chamber, and be ſtill*, Pſ. iv. 4. that we would ſit down, and ſedately ponder with ourſelves where we have all this while been, and what we have been a doing, and whither all this tends, what will be the iſſue and concluſion of our riots and vicious courſes, if we perſevere any longer in them. Oh! if we were thus wiſe, if we did thus conſider, I doubt not but through the grace of God, we ſhould, in a very little time feel a mighty change in our own minds; and the next news would be, that we ſhould imitate the prodigal in the ſecond ſtep he made to his repentance, *viz.* enter into moſt firm purpoſes and reſolutions to quit our lewd courſes, and to return to our heavenly Father, from whom we have ſo long and ſo unaccountably eſtranged ourſelves.

Now to perſuade all of you, who are concerned, thus to *come to yourſelves*, and thus to enter into ſerious

counſels and conſiderations about your own everlaſting intereſts, is that which I deſign in what I have further to ſay at this time: and in order hereunto, two things I deſire to lay before you.

I. Firſt of all, that it is this want of thinking and reflecting, and coming to yourſelves, that hath been the great occaſion of all your paſt ſins and follies.

II. That if you be once prevailed upon to come to yourſelves, and ſeriouſly to apply your minds to the conſideration of your own ſpiritual affairs, you cannot avoid the being brought to true repentance. Serious thinking, if it be practiſed and continued, will certainly have at laſt the ſame effect upon you that it had upon the prodigal; it will neceſſarily put you upon a hearty return to your Father.

Of theſe two things very briefly, and I have done.

1. It is the want of thinking and reflecting, that is the great occaſion of all the miſcarriages of our lives. It is not to be denied, that our natures are bad enough, and our propenſity to ſin is very great and lamentable; but yet I am confident, it is not ſo much that which hurries us into ſo many ſorts of follies and vices, as our raſhneſs and inconſideration. We will not give ourſelves liberty to think and reflect upon the conſequences of our actions before we venture upon them, but blindly ruſh into them; and hence comes the great degeneracy of human kind. We follow our preſent inclinations, and attend no further than juſt to what the object before us, or the circumſtances we are engaged in, do prompt us to; and thus we are at firſt betray'd into ſin: and after we have done a ſinful action once, or twice, or thrice, it goes down more glibly and eaſily afterward, and ſo by degrees it becomes familiar to us, till at laſt our ſins grow habitual and cuſtomary,

and

and then it is no eaſy matter to conquer them. The truth is, if it be examined, it will be found, that want of conſideration is the fountain of moſt of the miſcarriages of mankind. What is it that makes any man an atheiſt, or at leaſt to call in queſtion the being of God and providence, but merely that he will not give himſelf leave to think; will not be at the pains, with coolneſs and indifferency, to view the manifeſt effects and footſteps, which everywhere, and in every thing, are to be diſcovered of an infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs? And the ſame thing we ſay of all thoſe among us, who are infidels or ſceptics as to the chriſtian religion. If there be any man that is ſuch, it is not becauſe he wants evidence for the truth of the goſpel (for there is enough to convince the moſt curious enquirer upon earth) but becauſe he will not conſider. He runs on in a road of worldly buſineſs or ſenſuality, and cannot find either time or humour to enter into a ſerious and ſtrict enquiry into things of this nature. If a man would but uſe his reaſon fairly, and calmly attend to the arguments, that are, or may be every day offered to his mind for the convincing him of the being of God, or the truth of Chriſt's religion, he could almoſt as ſoon not be a man, as be an atheiſt or an unbeliever. And thus, as to the particular immoralities of our lives, I would aſk the moſt profligate profane perſon, whether he thinks it would be poſſible for him to live in the practice of common oaths and imprecations, if every time that he had a temptation to ſwear, or damn himſelf or thoſe about him, he did ſeriouſly conſider, that it is the dreadful name of God that he is now going to affront, who ſtands by, and is a witneſs of his blaſphemy, and that he is taking the ready courſe

to

to damn himſelf in good earneſt by his lewd abuſe of his tongue.

Again, what is it but mere ſottiſhneſs and inconſideration that makes any man follow a trade of drunkenneſs and ſenſuality? He could hardly turn himſelf into ſuch a brute, if his mind was ſcarce ever ſo little attentive to the diſmal conſequences that he draws upon himſelf, both as to his buſineſs, his health, his parts, his eſtate, his poſterity; to all theſe, as well as his ſoul, in following ſuch a courſe of life.

In a word, it is ſtupidity and unthinkingneſs that undoes us all. We may pretend the unhappineſs of our education, or the badneſs of our natures, or the force of temptations, or the irreſiſtible baits of pleaſure or gain, or the bewitching charms of company; I ſay, we may pretend all theſe things in excuſe for our careleſs or vicious lives: but when all is done, it is our own raſhneſs and inconſideration that ought generally to bear the greateſt blame. If we would but ſo order our affairs as to have the arguments and motives to religion ſeriouſly and frequently preſent to our minds, if we would vouchſafe them a place in our hearts, and meditate upon them, and digeſt them, it is impoſſible that a great many of us ſhould live as we do. Let but a man ponder deeply and often upon the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of his life, the madneſs and the folly, the ſhame and uneaſineſs of all ſorts of ſin; the joy, the peace, and the continual feaſt of innocency and a good conſcience; the ſerious deſire that God hath that we ſhould all be happy, his continual goodneſs expreſſed in a thouſand inſtances, which ſhould lead us to repentance; the ſevere account that we muſt one day give of all our actions; the unſpeakably glorious and immortal life that we may attain to by holineſs and virtue,

and

and the everlasting punishment in hell-fire, with the devil and his angels, that does certainly await all lewd, profane, ungodly, impenitent sinners: I say, let but a man seriously and constantly fix his thoughts upon these things, and I dare challenge him to be a bad man, if he can; I dare challenge him to live in whoredom or drunkenness, or in any other wicked course, if he can.

2. And this leads me to the other thing I have to represent about this business, and with it I conclude, *viz.* that wherever serious thinking and reflection is practised and continued, it never fails to produce reformation in the man that useth it.

And here I cannot but take notice of one thing. It is very observable, that when christianity was first preach'd by our Saviour, it had strange visible effects upon the hearts and lives of men. In those days, no sooner had a man taken upon him the profession of the gospel, but he became a good man, a holy liver, a mortifier of all his carnal lusts and appetites; he became dead to the world, and all the vanities of it, despised all earthly pleasures and glories, and was ready to lay down his life for his lord and master, whenever he was called to it. It was then a strange uncouth thing to hear of a lewd, vicious, debauch'd christian.

But now in these days, tho' we have the same religion, tho' the same doctrines be preached, the same arguments enforced, the same assistances of God's grace and Spirit afforded, yet we see there are none, or but very few of these effects amongst us. Christianity looks like another thing. We can now believe the gospel, and communicate with the church in all her offices, and hear our sins reproved, and our duty told us, and all the glorious promises of Christ displayed to

us,

us, and the dreadful threatnings of God denounced against us, and yet we are ſtill the ſame perſons that we were before. We continue as vain and as looſe in our converſation as ever, as uncharitable, and worldly-minded, as wrathful, and peeviſh, and cenſorious, as if we were ſtill in the darkneſs of heatheniſm, and the goſpel had never been preached to us. What now is the reaſon of this ſtrange diſparity between the effects of the goſpel then and thoſe now? Why truly the greateſt reaſon ſeems to be this, that the chriſtians in thoſe former times did ſeriouſly conſider their religion, and weigh its arguments and motives, but we do not. They took up their chriſtianity by choice, and we by chance or education. They, at their firſt entrance upon the profeſſion of the goſpel, gave themſelves the trouble of a diligent enquiry into the doctrines and duties of it, and the evidences for it; they conſider'd the goodneſs and reaſonableneſs of the precepts, the greatneſs of the promiſes, and the mighty encouragements to holineſs and virtue it laid upon mankind: and all theſe things they thought ſo long upon, till they found themſelves transformed into the ſpirit and temper of Jeſus the author of it; till they found in themſelves ſuch fruits and effects, as ſo excellent a religion ought in reaſon to produce: and ſuch fruits and effects will always be produced, where the ſame conſideration and application of mind is uſed.

But farther, to ſhew the mighty influence that ſerious conſideration hath upon a good life, I ought alſo to take notice of this, that even in our days, as barren and ineffectual as our religion proves among us, as hardened, and as inſenſible as we ſeem to be, yet there is none of us, but if we are at any time, upon any occaſion, brought to a ſerious conſideration of our own ways,

ways, and of the concernments of our ſouls, we preſently find ourſelves changed; we are in a manner another ſort of men. We have new thoughts, new deſires, new purpoſes, and reſolutions; and if that thinking and conſideration did continue, we ſhould, without doubt, change our lives in deed, as well as we do then in purpoſe. This we ſee frequently in ſick perſons; they who have been the moſt careleſs of men, they who have moſt deſpiſed religion, who have been proof againſt all the arguments of it while they were in health, yet when they come to their ſick beds, and begin to be awakened by the apprehenſion of death, into a ſerious conſideration of their own ſtate, how ſtrangely are they affected? how much do they repent of their former actions? how abſolutely neceſſary doth virtue and a holy life then appear to them? how full are they of ſtrong reſolutions to amend their ways, if ever God reſtore them to health again? how earneſtly do they aſk God's pardon for what is paſt, and pray for his grace for the future?

What now is the reaſon of all this? there was the ſame difference between virtue and vice before. They had the ſame arguments to fly the one, and to purſue the other before; only they now deeply conſider them, and apply them to their own hearts, which before they did not. They before liv'd at random; but now thinking it no time to fool or trifle any longer, they begin to entertain more ſerious counſels concerning themſelves.

And thus will it always be with all perſons in all circumſtances. If they can once be brought ſeriouſly to reflect and conſider, there is a good ſtep made towards their repentance; and if they continue their conſiderations, there is no doubt but they will at laſt become truly virtuous and holy perſons.

Oh! that we would now begin to apply our minds ſeriouſly to our ſpiritual concernments, and entertain the ſame thoughts that we ſhall be ſure to have when we come to die! Oh, what a world of trouble, care, and conſideration would it ſave us, which will certainly ſome time or other come upon us! We cannot always live without thinking. A time will come, when we ſhall conſider and reflect, whether we will or no. A time will come, when we ſhall not be able to divert our thoughts from thoſe things, which we are now ſo loth to think upon; and perhaps it may be then too late. Oh, happy they, who do, with the prodigal, *come to themſelves* in time, before their father's mercies be ſhut up againſt them! do with him ſo conſider their ways, as to take up the ſame reſolution that he did, *I will ariſe*, &c.

SER-

SERMON IV.

Of the true notion of ſcandals and offences. Popular miſapprehenſions about them rectify'd. Uſe to be made of the conſideration of their ill conſequences and frequency, &c.

MATTH. xviii. 7.

Woe unto the world, becauſe of offences; for it muſt needs be that offences come. But woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.

OUR Saviour, in the verſe before, had been ſaying, that *whoſoever ſhould offend one of theſe little ones that believe in him, it were better for him that a mill-ſtone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the ſea*, ver. 6. And in the next words he adds what I have now read, *Woe unto the world*, &c. We may gather from the former verſe, what a grievous thing it is in God's account to offend our brethren, even the meaneſt of them; and we may gather from the

the latter verſe, that yet notwithſtanding, this is a thing that is like to be frequently practiſed in the world, men will be giving offence to others, tho' *Woe be to the man by whom the offence cometh.* Since therefore this ſin of offending our brethren is declared to be ſo great, and withal ſo common, I think it concerns all of us to be rightly inſtructed wherein it doth conſiſt, that ſo we may not, thro' our miſtakes and falſe notions about it, either be troubled in our minds for having committed it when we have not, or be encouraged from the common practice of the world, to do ſuch actions, as will really bring us under the guilt of it.

The Greek word, which we here tranſlate offences, is σκάνδαλα, and from hence σκανδαλίζειν to offend, and σκανδαλίζεσθαι to be offended. Theſe words are uſed in the New-teſtament above forty times, and, I believe, always in the ſame ſenſe. But the Engliſh words by which we render them, *viz. Offences*, and *to offend*, and *to be offended*, as they are uſed by us in common ſpeech, do, by no means, give us a true idea of what is meant by thoſe Greek words in the ſacred writers: nor would it much mend the matter, if inſtead of offences, we would ſay ſcandals, and inſtead of offending we ſhould ſay ſcandalizing, and inſtead of being offended, we ſhould ſay being ſcandalized; for tho' theſe be Engliſh words now, and of the very ſame ſound with the Greek, and are indeed taken from them, yet as we commonly apply them, they have a quite different ſenſe in our language from what thoſe terms have in ſcripture. This word σκάνδαλον (upon which the two other depend) when it is taken in its proper ſenſe, ſignifies one of theſe two things, *viz.* either a trap or a ſnare to catch one in, or a block, or a ſtone that is laid in the way, at which people in the dark

dark are apt to ſtumble and fall. In the firſt ſignification it is uſed in the 69th Pſalm, ver. 23. *Let their table be made a ſnare to them*; where, in the Greek, it is *Let their table be made a ſcandal:* And in another Pſalm, *They ſet ſcandals in my way*, where our Engliſh rightly renders, *they ſet traps in my way*. In the other ſignification it is taken in the 19th of Lev. ver. 14. *Thou ſhalt not put a ſcandal before the blind*, that is, as we have tranſlated it, *thou ſhalt not put a ſtumbling-block before the blind*. And ſeveral ſuch inſtances are to be given.

This now being the primary ſenſe of the word ſcandal, when it is uſed properly and without a figure, we may eaſily from hence gather what the true notion of it is, when it is uſed metaphorically, or in a moral ſignification, as it is here in my text, and in all the others, where it is tranſlated by the word offence; for what a trap or a ſnare is to a beaſt, or what a ſtumbling-block in the way is to one that is blind, or to one who walketh in the dark, the ſame thing, that which we call an offence, is to a man's ſoul, *viz.* any thing by which a man's ſoul is endangered, any thing that occaſions his fall into ſin, any thing whereby he is hindered and diſcouraged from doing what he ought to do, or drawn away to do that which he ought not to do. In a word, an offence, ſuch as my text ſpeaks, of, is any impediment that a man meets with in the way of religion and godlineſs.

Taking now this along in our minds, we have an eaſy account, not only of the text I am now upon, but of all the others where this word is uſed: but I confine myſelf at this time to my text. *Whoſoever*, ſaith our Saviour, *ſhall offend one of theſe little ones that believe in me, it were better that a mill-ſtone were hanged*

hanged about his neck, ver. 6. —*Offend one of these little ones*, what is that? Whosoever shall lay any snares or stumbling-blocks before them, whereby they are diverted from their christian profession, or made to depart from that good way in which they are entered; whosoever shall thus seduce the meanest christian, whether it be by terror or by allurement, woe be to that man, he hath contracted an horrid guilt. And then come in the words of my text, *Woe be to the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh*; that is, as if our Saviour had said, mankind is in a dangerous condition upon account of the many temptations they are exposed to in the way of godliness. The variety of occasions they will meet with in the world, either to keep them from a holy and christian life, or to make them depart from it, after they have engag'd in it. It is indeed unavoidable but that such temptations and occasions to sin will be continually thrown in their way; but let them look to it, who are the authors or the causes of them, for they have much to answer for to Almighty God upon account thereof.

Having thus given you the plain sense of my text, I desire, before I enter further into the points contain'd in it, to make two or three reflections upon what I have already said concerning the notion of scandals or offences.

1. And first of all, it appears, that the common opinion which people among us have taken up about giving offence, hath no ground or foundation in the holy scripture, men judging of this matter by the mere sound of the English word, usually run away with this, that *to offend*, or *to give an offence* to another, is to do any thing

thing that may grieve or displease him, or make him angry with us; and upon that account some take themselves to be obliged in conscience to avoid all those things, which some well-meaning persons they converse with, do not like or approve of, as thinking, that every action they do, which is disagreeable to their humours, is really a giving offence to them in a sense that our Saviour here forbids. I do readily grant, that no man should willlingly or causelessly do any action, at which another may be grieved or displeased. Civility and good manners will oblige us to it, or if that do not, I am sure christian charity will. But then, I say, it is one thing to grieve or displease our brother, and another thing to scandalize him, or to give him offence; for, as I have shewn, we then only do this latter, when we lay snares and temptations before him, that may endanger his virtue, and occasion his falling into sin. The truth is, if this was the sin of giving scandal, to act contrary to the humours and sentiments of others, it would be impossible for any man to live so, as not to be almost daily guilty of it; for there are few of the common actions that a man doth, so clear and unexceptionable, but that there are those to be met with, who will censure and condemn them, and be angry with the man that doth them.

2. Another thing we may collect from this account we have been giving of scandals and offences, is this, that they who are most apt to complain of their being scandalized or offended with some things which they see others do, are really least in danger of being so in the true sense of the word; or, if they be indeed scandalized or offended by those things, they, of all others, deserve the least compassion: for a scandal or an offence being nothing else but a stumbling-block laid before

one to make him fall, or a ſnare put in his way to entrap him in a ſin, for any man to ſay, that he is ſcandalized with this or the other action which he ſees his neighbour do, is to ſuppoſe, that he is ſenſible that that action is a block in his way, and may occaſion his fall; that he is aware that it is a great temptation to him to ſin againſt God. Now, in this caſe, I ſay, he either is not ſcandalized, or, if he be, he is extremely to be blamed for it; for, if he reſiſts the temptation, and keeps cloſe to his duty, notwithſtanding this occaſion of ſinning, then he is not ſcandalized or offended, becauſe he avoids the offence. On the other ſide, if he cloſe with the temptation, knowing it as he doth, and be enſnared in the ſin, having his eyes thus opened to ſee the danger, what pity doth he deſerve? He is to be accounted a wilful preſumptuous tranſgreſſor.

3. Another thing which I obſerve from this doctrine of offences, is this, that we are oftentimes in as much danger of ſcandalizing and offending others, by pleaſing them, and complying with their humours, as by doing ſuch things as are offenſive and diſtaſteful to them. Thus, for inſtance, to give a man money, when we are morally certain, that he will ſpend it in ſuch ways as will either be hurtful to himſelf or others; or to ſet ſtrong drink before a man, who has already drunk beyond the pitch of temperance; in both theſe caſes the humours of the men are pleaſed and gratified; but yet, in truth, we do, in both theſe inſtances, really ſcandalize or offend them, in the ſcripture ſenſe of the word; becauſe we do directly lay a ſnare and temptation before them to commit ſin: whereas, if we had been leſs kind in the one caſe, and leſs civil in the other, though we had diſpleaſed them by being ſo, we had avoided the giving ſcandal, and done more agree-

ably

ably to our duty: and thus it is in all cases, where a man lies under any criminal mistake, or goes on in the pursuit of any vicious inclination or evil custom. The danger here of offending them doth not lie in opposing their humours or thwarting them in these ways, or by shewing by our words and actions how much we disapprove of them, but by complying with them, and by our silence, or our countenance, encouraging them in their sinful prejudices or vicious courses.

4. Another thing to be taken notice of upon this occasion, is this, that a man cannot be guilty of offending his brother in the scripture sense of the word, so long as he is doing his duty. Or, if ever it does happen, that any one is drawn or led to commit a sin, by seeing another do an action that he is really bound to do; in that case the sin lies wholly at his own door, nor hath that other man any thing to answer for it: here is indeed an offence taken, but here is none given. The one man is really scandalized and offended, but the other man not being the cause of it, is not to be blamed for it; and the reason of this is evident. No man can be obliged to contradictions, and therefore all the parts of a man's duty must be consistent one with another; and if so, then it cannot be supposed, that at the same time a man is obeying a law of God, he should at the same time sin against his neighbour, as he really must do, if by any action of his that was a duty, he could give offence, or lay a stumbling-block before his neighbour. The use that I make of this, is, that we are not to forbear any action, which either the laws of God, or the laws of man, whether ecclesiastical or civil, have obliged us to (so long as those laws of man are not inconsistent with the laws of God) for fear of giving offence to others; for if any be scandalized at

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our performing our duty (as certainly it is every man's duty to obey God and his lawful ſuperiors) it is their fault, and none of ours.

5. There is one thing more that is fit to be added, and then, I think, we have taken in all the material difficulties that can happen in this buſineſs, of giving offence to our brethren; and that is this, that tho' we can give no ſcandal or offence to any by any action that it is our duty to do, yet it may ſometimes happen, that we may give offence to others by an indiſcreet uſe of our liberty in things which are otherwiſe lawful. My meaning is this: A direct tempting of men to ſin, or the doing any ill thing by which others may be encouraged to ſin; theſe are not the only inſtances in which a man may offend his brethren (tho' indeed theſe are the moſt notorious and moſt common) but a man may give offence alſo in the forbidden ſenſe, when he doth ſome action lawful in itſelf to be done, and perhaps likewiſe done by him with an innocent deſign, but which he foreſees may probably be an inducement or an occaſion to draw others into ſome ſin; I ſay, even this is a giving offence, and laying a ſtumbling-block before our brethren. It is certain that every man is bound, in charity to his brother's ſoul, thus far to deny himſelf, *viz.* as to forbear thoſe actions which otherwiſe he might lawfully do, when the caſe ſo happens, that thoſe actions, if they be done, will in all probability be a ſnare to others to do ſomething that they ought not to do. And this is the very caſe about which St. Paul is ſo large in the 14th chap. of his epiſtle to the Romans, and 8th and 10th chapters of the 1ſt epiſtle to the Corinthians, where he treats of this argument. The ſum of his diſcourſe of ſcandals in theſe epiſtles, comes to this, that in matters purely indifferent, which

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are neither tied upon us by the laws of God nor man, but it is perfectly left at our liberty whether we will act or not act. In all these cases we should have so much regard to the ignorance and infirmities and prejudices of those we converse with, as rather to forbear the practice of those things which are otherwise lawful, and we may freely do, than by using our liberty in such things, to give encouragement to other mens sins, or to be a blameable occasion of another man's fall.

Having thus far treated of the nature of scandals and offences, in order to the rectifying some popular misapprehensions about them, I proceed now to say a little (and it shall be but a little) to those points, which the text I am upon doth more particularly suggest to our consideration, with relation to this matter.

Woe unto the world, says our Saviour, *because of offences; it must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.*

Three things here our Saviour declares unto us:

I. The dangers and sad consequences that scandals or offences do bring upon mankind. *Woe unto the world because of offences.*

II. The necessity and unavoidableness of them. *It must needs be that offences come.*

III. The heinous guilt and punishment of those who are the authors of them. *But woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.*

Of these three points very briefly.

1. We have here set forth the danger and sad consequences that offences bring upon mankind; *Woe*, &c. And indeed this woe that our Lord pronounced hath been too sadly made good in all ages from his time to this. Mankind has ever been, and are still in a woful deplorable condition, thro' the manifold offences and

ſcandals that have been thrown in their way. To paſs by former times, and only to ſpeak of our own; if any man looks abroad into the world, he cannot but be ſenſible, that the dangers to which men are expoſed upon this account are infinite, and the conſequences of them very fatal to abundance of people. What thro' the atheiſm, and the infidelity, and the no-religion of men on one hand, and thro' the ſcepticiſm, and hereſies, and falſe religion of many on the other; what thro' the multitude of ill examples that are every day given, and the manifold enticements to vice and debauchery that all places do abound with; what thro' the perſuaſions and allurements of inſinuating companions, and the frowns and diſcouragements of another ſort, who *think it ſtrange*, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, *if we run not with them into the ſame exceſs of riot*, 1. Pet. iv. 4. I ſay, what thro' theſe, and other ſcandals (for all theſe are moſt properly ſcandals and ſtumbling-blocks) which perſons of all ages, and ſexes, and ranks, do meet with, the world is at that paſs, that really it is a moſt hazardous thing to live in it: nor is there any condition or ſtate of life ſo ſafe, but that one is in danger of making ſhipwreck of his virtue; and how well ſoever one is inclined, he no ſooner comes abroad into the world, but he runs a great riſk of being corrupted either in his principles or his morals, either of becoming a miſbeliever or an unbeliever, or a vicious liver. And indeed we cannot wonder at it, when we conſider how natural a thing it is for a man to get the ſame opinions and ſentiments of things which they have with whom he converſeth, and how hard to reſiſt the importunity of friends, or to ſtand out againſt the violence of great temptations; how difficult not to be obliged by kindneſs, or frightened with diſcouragements;

ments; what charms there are in agreeable converſation, and how uneaſy a life it is to be always wreſtling againſt a torrent of examples, eſpecially when pleaſure, or intereſt, or the favour of great men do plead on their ſide: theſe things being conſidered, it is no wonder that the temptations and ſtumbling-blocks, which are daily thrown before men in the way of religion and virtue, ſhould have ſuch a direful influence and ſucceſs upon their minds and manners as they have, and that upon the account thereof ſo many are perverted from the good way they were in, and ſo many hardened in falſe principles and vicious courſes.

The uſe I would make of this point at preſent (tho' a great many others might be made) is this: Since the offences that happen in the world render it ſo dangerous a place, it will highly concern all thoſe, who have the charge of others committed to them, to be wonderfully careful, both to keep them from theſe offences, and to arm and fortify their minds againſt them. Tho' there be no certain infallible fence againſt the miſchiefs of the ſcandals of this world, yet the beſt and ſureſt fence there is, is a good education, and being ſeaſoned with virtuous principles in our tender years. It behoves therefore all parents, and others who have young people in their care, to look diligently to this, to ſee that they be trained up in the fear of God, to ſet good examples before them of ſobriety, and honeſty, and good nature, and a religious converſation; to poſſeſs their minds with a hearty and deep ſenſe of the difference between good and evil, the ways of God and the ways of ſin, and the indiſpenſible obligation that is upon them both, in order to their living happily here and hereafter; to purſue the one, and avoid the other; to inſtruct them in the principles of the true

religion, and to furniſh them with arguments both againſt error and vice: and laſtly, when there is a neceſſity of ſending them abroad from under their own wing, to make ſuch proviſions for them, and to diſpoſe them into ſuch circumſtances of living, as that they may both know how to ſpend their time innocently and uſefully, and withal be obnoxious to as few dangers and temptations as their condition will admit. Theſe endeavours, together with our hearty prayers to God for his bleſſing upon them, are the moſt certain expedients to ſecure our children from the horrible miſchiefs and inconveniencies that the multitude of ſcandals bring upon the world. And indeed I might appeal to experience for the truth of this. Perſons, who have this care taken of their education, do not often miſcarry; and tho' it may now and then happen to be the misfortune of ſome of them to be over-borne by temptations, nay, and perhaps for ſome time of their lives, to give themſelves a looſe to a courſe of vice and immorality, yet generally the good principles wherewith their minds were ſeaſoned in their youth, do, thro' God's grace, ſome time or other, operate, and have their due effect at laſt.

2. The ſecond thing that our Saviour here declares to us, is the unavoidableneſs of thoſe ſcandals among mankind. *It muſt needs be*, &c. The Greek word is ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἐστι, *there is a neceſſity for it*. St. Luke expreſſes it by ἀδύνατον ἐστι, *it is impoſſible but offences will come*, Luke xvii. 1. ἀνεύδεκτον ἐστι. And indeed the reaſon is very plain why they muſt come; for ſo long as there is a multitude of evil angels about us, who malign the welfare of mankind, and make it their buſineſs to ſow tares where Chriſt has ſown his good ſeed; and ſo long as there are men in the world, who do

carry on the intereſts of that kingdom of darkneſs, either by teaching doctrines which are contrary to chriſtian truth, or by promoting practices contrary to chriſtian holineſs: in a word, ſo long as God is pleaſed to permit in the world, either the temptations of the devil, or the follies and ſins of mankind, ſo long it *muſt needs be that offences will come.*

But ſome may ſay, is it not a great flaw in the divine providence, that he ſuffers theſe things? Doth it not ſeem very incongruous and unbecoming that care which we all believe God takes of mankind, to expoſe them thus to ſcandals and ſtumbling blocks, which he knows to be ſo dangerous, and of ſuch fatal conſequence to many of them? I anſwer, no, it doth not: There is nothing in this proceeding, but what ſuits very well with all God's attributes. If he has made men free agents, and given them ſuch natures as they may either do well or do ill, then it is but reaſonable that he ſhould ſuffer them to act according to thoſe natures; and if he do ſo ſuffer them, then all thoſe effects we have ſpoken of, will follow. God is no-ways the author of thoſe ſcandals, and therefore they are not in any-wiſe to be charged upon him: but men, by abuſing their liberty, and yielding to the temptations of the devil, are the cauſes of them. Nor is it reaſonable, that God ſhould interpoſe his omnipotence for the putting a ſtop to them, becauſe that would be to deal with mankind in a way contrary to their own natures, and to put a force upon free agents: but then here appears the wiſdom and goodneſs of divine providence; tho' God does not hinder theſe things, yet he ſo orders the matter, that excellent ends are ſerved by them. He, who brings light out of darkneſs, can, and doth bring a great deal of good to mankind by theſe grievous evils:

For by these scandals and offences which happen in the world, 1. The reality and sincerity of mens pretensions to religion are effectually tried. 2. The graces and virtues of the good are hereby extreamly improved. And lastly, the consequence of that, is a vast increase of glory to them, in the day when our Lord Jesus shall come to judge the world.

The use I make of this point is this: Since it must needs be that offences come, since, according to the course of this world, there will be always so many temptations and stumbling-blocks laid before men in the way of virtue and godliness, let no man be surprized when he meets with them, or stand amazed, as if some strange and unusual thing had happened unto him. There is nobody must think or expect to pass his time in this world in so profound an ease and undisturbedness, but that his virtue will be exposed to frequent, nay, and sometimes to difficult trials. What therefore has every one to do, but to prepare himself for them; to put his affairs in such a posture, as that he may be in a readiness to encounter them. The offences of this world do really make the life of a christian to be a constant warfare, and accordingly it is often so stiled in the New-testament; and therefore, whosoever takes upon him that life, it will concern him to have his eyes open, and always to stand upon his guard; to look every day for assaults of one kind or other, and accordingly to be prepared for them: but how is that to be done? Why, by being watchful over our own actions, and considering well before-hand what business, or what company we engage in; by fortifying our minds with good resolutions, and calling in to our assistance all those motives and arguments to virtue and holiness, that the religion of our Lord will furnish us with;

with; and by frequently and heartily devoting ourselves to the service of our master Christ, and earnestly imploring his continual assistance, and direction, and support in all our undertakings. Now, if we do thus take care to provide ourselves against the offences that may happen, we need not be troubled or frightned when they come; for to a man thus armed and fortified, they will do no harm, but a great deal of good, (as I said before) of what nature or kind soever they be. If we do our parts towards securing our innocency, God undoubtedly will not fail to do his; and as terrible and dangerous a place as the world is, upon account of the multitude of scandals that are therein, we shall have a safe and prosperous, tho' not always an easy passage thro' it. Let us therefore be of good comfort under whatever trials and temptations God in his providence may think fit to expose us to. If we do not forsake ourselves, he will never forsake us; we have his word for it, that *he will never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able*, 1 Cor. x. 13. and, if ever he suffers a great and an unusual temptation to come upon us, why, in that case, *he will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.*

3. The last thing observable in my text, is, the heinous guilt and punishment of those who are the authors of scandals and offences. *Woe be to that man*, &c. What a terrible woe this is, and what a dreadful punishment it doth involve in it, appears from what our Lord had said in the verse before. *Verily I say unto you*, &c. *it were better for that man, that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.* The meaning of which is, he who shall, either by word or action, discourage the

very meaneſt of Chriſt's diſciples from going on in the chriſtian profeſſion and practice; ſhall tempt him, or ſeduce him from his duty, and draw him into ſin, it is better for that man that he ſhould be hurled to the bottom of the ſea, never to riſe again. What a lively emphatical deſcription have we here of the diſmal condition of all thoſe, by whoſe means ſcandals and offences come! And it is obſervable, that this is declared concerning ſuch a man as ſhall offend any one, even of the meaneſt and weakeſt of all thoſe who profeſs the chriſtian religion; and if ſo, how unexpreſſibly great is their guilt, and how ſad ſhall be their puniſhment, who have not only offended one, but many hundreds, by debauching their principles or morals; by being adviſers, or tempters, or occaſions to them of ſin, always ſuppoſing, unleſs they do timely repent of this their wickedneſs, and make it their buſineſs from henceforward to live entirely to God, and to endeavour as much the promoting the intereſts of virtue and religion, as they did before of ſin and the devil.

The uſe that I make of this point is, that all of us, as we love our ſouls, would have a care of being the authors of offences, or of ſetting temptations before others, of ſinning againſt God. Let us have a care of having any hand in the ſins of others, either by adviſing them, or encouraging them; let us have a care in all our converſation of tempting or enticing any one in any way, to do that which he ought not to do, as, God knows, this is a fault too common in moſt companies, eſpecially in the buſineſs of drinking; and I might name other inſtances. Let us have a care never to ſay or do any thing, that may diſcourage any man in the practice of that which is good; that we do not ſet an ill example before thoſe we converſe with, and by that means

means lay a ſtumbling-block in their way, to make them go and do likewiſe. This caſe doth highly concern all of us, in whatever circumſtances we are in; but it doth more eſpecially concern thoſe, who are placed in any public office or ſtation, ſuch as magiſtrates; or in any degree of eminence above others, as the nobility and gentry among us. The influence of the lives and actions of all theſe ſort of perſons do extend to a great many; and the encouragement they give to looſeneſs and immorality, either by their countenance, or by their example, is of infinite evil conſequence to all about them, nay, to the whole nation; for they are the patterns which meaner people propoſe to themſelves to frame their lives by; and if any ſort of vice or ſin be faſhionable among them, it will of neceſſity, by degrees, get reputation among the multitude; and therefore they, above all others, are concerned in this point, of not giving offence; to take care, both of their practice and of their principles; for if either of theſe be naught, the ſcandals that will enſue thereupon are certain and inevitable.

And this give me leave to ſay, and I conclude with it, that until the men of quality among us, they who have eſtates and fortunes, they who have dignity and authority, do ſeriouſly ſet themſelves to live ſober, and ſtrict, and religious lives, to ſhew an eſteem and veneration to God and his ſervice, to diſcourage vice and profaneneſs, and to countenance virtue and goodneſs in all about them, by ſetting examples of temperance, charity and devotion, there is little hope that our nation will ever be recovered from that deluge of atheiſm and irreligion, and univerſal corruption of manners, which have overſpread it, and which all ſenſible men too ſadly and juſtly complain of.

SERMON V.

The duty and advantages of public Faſting in general.

JONAH iii. 5.

The people of Nineveh *believed God, and proclaimed a faſt.*

WE have in this ſhort prophecy, one of the moſt wonderful and remarkable relations that is almoſt to be met with in any hiſtory. God, it ſeems, was highly *diſpleaſed with the wickedneſs of the people of Nineveh*, (ch. i. 2.) which at that time was one of the greateſt cities in the world, and the capital of the Aſſyrian Empire. And thereupon he orders Jonah, one of the prophets among the Jews, (within the compaſs of which nation his prophets and his church were then contained) to go and preach to them, and to tell them peremptorily, that within a very little while their whole city ſhould be deſtroy'd. Jonah, whether he thought his meſſage would not be believed, or whether he thought that God, upon the Ninevites repentance, might alter his purpoſe, and ſo he ſhould appear a falſe prophet; or whether he looked

looked upon this ſending of him to a heathen people to be an ill omen to his own nation, the Jews, of God's caſting them off, and taking the Gentiles into their place: Jonah, (ver. 3.) I ſay, was very unwilling to undertake this employment, and did all that ever he could to decline it. Accordingly, inſtead of going to Nineveh, as God had directed him, *he took ſhipping for Tarſhiſh.* But this would not do; God Almighty found him out, (ver. 4.—15.) and ſent ſuch a ſtorm upon the ſea, that there was no way left of ſaving the ſhip, wherein he was, from wreck, but by caſting him into the ſea: which being once done, the tempeſt ceaſed, and there was a great calm. As for Jonah, God provided a whale to receive him after he was caſt into the deep, and after three days to expoſe him again upon the dry land, (ver. 17.)

This judgment upon Jonah, and his miraculous preſervation after it, as it render'd the mind of the prophet pliable and obedient to God's will, ſo did it prove, in all probability, his letter of credence from God to the Ninevites. For after this to Nineveh Jonah comes; (ch. iii. 3.) and there, as God had order'd him, he denounceth God's judgments againſt them, poſitively declaring, *that within forty days* Nineveh *ſhould be deſtroyed*, (v. 4.) One would wonder that ſo ſtrange a meſſage ſhould meet with any belief in a Pagan City, eſpecially, as far as we can gather from the ſtory, there being then no appearance of any immediate danger that could give them apprehenſions of ſuch a ſudden deſtruction. But God never ſends an embaſſy to mankind but he ſome way or other takes care to give teſtimony to the embaſſador. Either Jonah wrought ſome extraordinary works to evidence the truth of his miſſion from God, or (as it is very likely) ſeveral of thoſe merchants who had

had been witneſſes of the whole ſtrange adventure that had befallen him, were there upon the ſpot to atteſt it, and ſo gain credit to his preaching. However, the event that his preaching had was remarkable, and what was then done by the King of Nineveh and his people, upon the preaching of Jonah, ought to be a pattern to all ſucceeding generations to follow, whenever they are alarm'd by the approaching judgments of God.

No ſooner had Jonah preached that Nineveh ſhould be deſtroy'd, but *the people of* Nineveh *believed God and proclaimed a faſt.* Or, as it is expreſſed in the following verſes, a day of faſting and humiliation was *proclaimed throughout* Nineveh *by order of the king and his nobles*, ver. 7. And the ſolemnity of this faſt was extraordinary, for the *king roſe from his throne*, and *laid aſide his robes of ſtate, and covered himſelf with ſackcloth*, ver. 6. and the *people alſo, from the greateſt to the leaſt, put on ſackcloth*, ver. 5. that being the manner of expreſſing ſorrow and humiliation among the eaſtern nations. But this was not all. Not only the king and the people kept a faſt, but they made their beaſts, their flocks, and their herds to do ſo likewiſe. For thus the proclamation ran; *Let neither man nor beaſt, herd nor flock, taſte any thing; let them not feed nor drink water*, ver. 7. The faſting here refers to the man. *The feeding and drinking water* to the *cattle.* This way of keeping faſt may ſeem ſtrange to us, but it was not ſo to the Pagan nations. For Virgil, when he deſcribes the ſolemn mourning that was upon the death of Julius Cæſar, tells us, that on that day the oxen were not fed, nor any of the cattle driven to water. And indeed this circumſtance, if it be well conſidered, will not appear ſo extravagant or unreaſonable in a public mourning, as at firſt may be imagined.

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For it doth in some degree contribute to the great solemnity of it: and likewise it is in its own nature apt to excite men the more to afflict themselves. However, it is a very good expression of their carelessness and unconcernedness about all their worldly matters, and their entire giving up themselves to sorrow. But this by the by, for the giving some light to this passage of scripture.

To proceed. This fasting and afflicting of their bodies was not the only expression of the Ninevites repentance: they were by the proclamation commanded *every man to cry mightily to the Lord*, ver. 8. To put up earnest prayers to him, that he would pardon their sins, and spare their city. And not only so, but which was the main thing of all, *to turn every man from his evil ways*; to forsake those sins they were guilty of; especially that which was the crying notorious sin of the city, which it seems by the text was injustice and oppression. *Let every one turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hand*, ver 8. And this, as it follows, they faithfully put in practice. What now was the result of all this? What benefit did the king of Nineveh receive by this their solemn fasting and prayer? Why they obtained all that they desired; for it is told us, that *God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

This is a brief account of the case of Nineveh, as it is here related by the prophet. Two things we may gather from it, very proper to be insisted on upon this day. On this day, I say, wherein after the example of the Ninevites, the whole people of this land, by proclamation of the queen and her nobles, are met together,

gether, "To humble ourſelves before Almighty God "for our manifold ſins, and to ſupplicate his divine "majeſty for the pardon of them, and the preſervation "of us from the hands of our enemies, by protecting "her majeſty, and giving happy ſucceſs to her arms "both by ſea and land."

Two things, I ſay, we may gather from this ſtory:

Firſt, Of how great efficacy public faſting and prayer, when duly performed, are, for the averting public judgments, and the procuring public bleſſings.

Secondly, What is required to a due performance of public faſting and prayer, ſo that they may prove thus effectual. I begin with

I. The efficacy of public faſting and prayer, when duly performed, for the averting public judgments and obtaining public bleſſings. We cannot deny our aſſent to this, if we believe the ſtory of the Ninevites, which I have now given an account of. And we can no more doubt of the truth of that ſtory, than we doubt of the truth of what our Saviour himſelf hath delivered. For he on ſolemn occaſions has confirmed the main parts of that ſtory, by giving teſtimony both of Jonah's being *three days and three nights in the whale's belly*, and likewiſe to the *repentance of the* Ninevites *upon his preaching to them*, Matt. xii. 40, 41. But there are other as illuſtrious proofs to be met with in ſcripture of the efficacy of faſting and prayer, for thoſe purpoſes, as is this inſtance of the Ninevites. When the Moabites and Amorites and other neighbouring nations were gathered together in a great army againſt Judah, (2 Chron. xx. ver. 1.) and the king and all the nation were in a very great conſternation, by reaſon of the danger that thereby threatened them, what courſe do they take

take to obtain deliverance of God from thoſe very enemies? Why it is told us in the chapter that was read this morning, That *Jehoſhaphat the king was afraid, and ſet himſelf to ſeek the Lord, and proclaimed a faſt throughout all* Judah, 2 Chron. xx. ver. 3. *And* Judah *gathered themſelves together to aſk help of the Lord; even out of all the cities of* Judah *they came to ſeek the Lord*, ver. 4. And the ſucceſs of their faſting and prayer was anſwerable to their expectation: For God was *intreated hereby, and wrought that day a great deliverance for his people, deſtroying all their enemies, and that without any fighting on their parts, by ſetting them one againſt another*, ver. 22, 23, &c.

Thus alſo when the Jews were carried captive into Babylon, what other means did they uſe for their delivery out of that bondage, but thoſe we are ſpeaking of; a public ſolemn faſt, and prayer to God. Thus it is told us, *That a ſolemn faſt was proclaimed, that they might afflict themſelves before the Lord their God, to ſeek of him a right way for them, and for their little ones, and for their ſubſtance*, Ezra viii. 21. And then it follows, *That they faſted and beſought God for this, and he was intreated of them*, ver. 23.

Thus again when the whole nation of the Jews was in danger to be utterly deſtroyed, by the cruel orders that Ahaſuerus the king had ſent forth, that on a certain day they ſhould be maſſacred, (Eſther iii. 13.) man, woman, and child, throughout his dominions; the remedy which they apply to in this extremity, was ſtill faſting and prayer. *In every province whereſoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was a great mourning among the* Jews, *and faſting and weeping; and many lay in ſackcloth and aſhes*, chap. iv. ver. 3. And God had regard to this their faſting and humiliation,

humiliation, and raised up queen Esther to save them from destruction; she likewise having first prepared herself for this work, by solemn fasting and prayer.

Lastly, To name no more texts: This is the method that God himself prescribed to his people for the preventing that destruction that he had solemnly threatened them with by his prophet Joel. *Now, saith the Lord, turn ye even unto me, with all your heart, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning,* Joel ii. ver. 12. *and rent your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil,* ver. 13. *Blow the trumpet in Sion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly,* ver. 15. *gather the people; assemble the elders; gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet,* ver. 16. *Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; and let them say, spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them,* ver. 17. Well, what success were they to expect when they had done this? Why it follows, *Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and will pity his people,* ver. 18. *Yea, the Lord will answer, and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen,* ver. 19. *but I will remove far off from you the northern army,* ver. 20. and so on.

But this doctrine of the efficacy of fasting and prayer for the averting public judgments will not go down with some among us. There are a sort of men that think very meanly of these exercises, and all such like.

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They will not deny but there may be ſome policy in ſetting apart days of faſting and prayer in extraordinary emergencies. But as for any real benefit from God by ſuch appointment, notwithſtanding all our ſcripture-ſtories, they believe nothing of it. May I have leave to propoſe and examine a little what they have to ſay for this their opinion.

Some of them go upon the hypotheſis of God's decrees. If, ſay they, God governs the world, it is certain every thing comes to paſs by his order and decrees. And can we be ſo fooliſh as to think that we can make him alter his counſels or change his methods of acting by our faſting or prayers, or any thing that we can do? But to this I anſwer; If this be a difficulty, ſure it is no very great one; for the Ninevites in my text eaſily got over it: and yet in their caſe they had a fairer colour to make this objection againſt their faſting and prayer than any of us can poſſibly have. God, as you have heard, ſent his prophet to them, to deliver to them a ſhort, but very peremptory meſſage, *that within forty days* Nineveh *ſhould be deſtroyed.* This the prophet told them, and this they believed. According to theſe mens reaſoning now, how could they hope, by any act or endeavour of theirs, to reverſe the decrees of God? Either God reſolved to deſtroy their city, or he did not. If he did not, Jonah was a falſe prophet, and they might, for all his preaching, have ſecurely continued in that courſe they had hitherto followed. If God did really reſolve to do as he had ſaid, his will and counſel being unchangeable, muſt ſtand firm; nor can any human creature, by any thing he can do, either reſiſt it or alter it. To what purpoſe therefore ſhould they uſe endeavours? But the Ninevites did not reaſon thus, but argued after another manner:

manner: *Who can tell*, ſay they, *but God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we periſh not*, chap. iii. ver. 9. They believed God's decree to be conditional. If they turned from their evil ways, they thought God would turn from his fierce indignation. If they changed their manners, God would change his purpoſe: and therefore doing what was in their power, they promiſed to themſelves good ſucceſs; and the event ſhewed that in this matter they reaſoned very truly.

Well, but this anſwer does not ſatisfy. The Ninevites might reaſon as they pleaſed; but every one who knows any thing of God, knows that he is in his nature unchangeable, (immutability being one of his eſſential attributes.) And this the ſcripture declares over and over again, telling us, that *with him there is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning*, James i. 17. and that the *ſtrength of Iſrael*, as he *cannot lie*, ſo neither *can he repent, for he is not a man that he ſhould repent*, 1 Sam. xv. 29. But now to ſuppoſe that upon our faſting and prayer God grants ſome things to us, or confers ſome benefits upon us, which without that faſting and prayer he would not have done, is in effect to ſay, that our faſting and prayers can produce a change, an alteration in the mind and counſel of God; and then, what is become of his immutability? But in truth, this, tho' it looks like an argument, is but a mere fallacy. God's hearkening to, or being moved by our prayers or other endeavours, doth not in the leaſt claſh with the unchangeableneſs of his nature. It is true, when upon our prayers, and faſting and repentance, God is pleaſed to give us thoſe things we pray for, which without thoſe conditions he would not have done; it cannot be denied that here is a change ſomewhere: But if the matter

matter be examined, it will be found to be in us, and not in God. God's mind was always the ſame towards us; that is, he reſolved, that if we humbly and heartily begg'd ſuch and ſuch mercies and bleſſings at his hands, and did otherwiſe qualify ourſelves for them, we ſhould have them; but if we did not, we ſhould go without them. When therefore upon our prayers we obtain that deliverance, or that bleſſing, which we had not before, it is not he that is changed, but we. We, by performing the conditions he required of us, do look with another aſpect towards him, do intitle ourſelves to another kind of dealing with us than we could claim before; we have made ourſelves capable of receiving thoſe benefits, which before we were not.

And thus much of the firſt objection againſt the efficacy of faſting and prayer, for the obtaining bleſſings from God. But there is another that is urged by another ſort of men, which ought not here to be paſſed by without conſidering it.

It is of thoſe who hold the neceſſity of all events upon mechanical principles. They believe the world to be a great machine, and whatſoever comes to paſs therein, is the effect of thoſe fixed and unalterable laws of motion which are eſtabliſhed in it; ſo that whatever happens among mankind has a natural and a neceſſary cauſe to produce it. And therefore however in common ſpeech we call thoſe things that are grateful to us the bleſſings of God, or if they be grievous to us, we call them the puniſhments of God for our ſins, yet they do and muſt happen promiſcuouſly and indifferently to the good and to the bad: and therefore to what purpoſe is it to faſt and to pray for the obtaining of good things, or removing of evil things from us, unleſs we can ſuppoſe that by theſe our endeavours we

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can ſtop the courſe of nature, or God will ſtop it for our ſakes?

This is the objection, and two things I have to ſay in anſwer to it: Firſt, Tho' it ſhould be granted that all outward events owe their production immediately to outward and neceſſary cauſes, and that God does not interpoſe in the hindering or furthering of them, but leaves ſecond cauſes to work according to their nature: yet there is one whole kind of things, and thoſe too, that either are or ought to be the greateſt matter of our prayers, that the objection does not at all reach to, *viz.* thoſe which we call ſpiritual things; ſuch are, not only the pardon of our ſins, and the favour of God, but all the perfections and accompliſhments of our minds, wiſdom, and prudence, and fortitude, and all the moral virtues. Theſe, I hope, cannot be called the reſult of neceſſary outward cauſes, but are the effects of God's grace, and our own endeavours. Theſe therefore, I hope, we may both reaſonably, and with aſſurance of ſucceſs, pray for, notwithſtanding any thing ſaid in the objection to the contrary. And yet let me tell you, even the obtaining theſe things will go a great way not only to the bettering the condition of private perſons, and delivering them out of their evil circumſtances; but to the making any nation or people great, and happy, and proſperous. For inſtance, if it ſhould pleaſe God upon our hearty repentance and fervent prayers on this day to pour out his Spirit upon all orders and degrees of men among us, and make all her majeſty's ſubjects in their ſeveral ſtations ſincerely good and virtuous; if it ſhould pleaſe God to inſpire all her public and her private counſels with true wiſdom and unanimity, and a hearty zeal for promoting the public good before any private intereſts: if it ſhould

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pleaſe him to inſpire all her officers and ſoldiers with courage, and reſolution, and diligence; all her miniſters with integrity and uncorruptneſs; and all her people with the true fear of God, and loyal hearts to her majeſty, and ſincere love and charity to one another: I would aſk whether theſe very things alone, whatever diſcouragements we might have from ſtorms and tempeſt, and all other things that depend upon natural cauſes, would not give us a glorious proſpect of happy times, and put us into comfortable hopes of having thoſe judgments averted which we are now afraid of, and of obtaining all thoſe bleſſings which on this day we pray for. And yet all theſe things I have now mentioned are out of the reach, as I ſaid, of mechanical cauſes. The laws of motion have nothing to do with them; but they are the pure reſult of the grace and Spirit of God, and of our own hearty prayers and endeavours.

But, ſecondly, As for thoſe outward events which come upon this world, that ſeem to depend upon ſuch principles as we have no power over; ſuch as health or ſickneſs, peace or war, good or bad weather, plenty or ſcarcity, victory over our enemies, or being overthrown by them, and the like: Tho' it be acknowledged that all theſe have natural cauſes, yet they have not ſuch natural cauſes as are neceſſary. They come to us in a natural way, but do not come to us in ſuch a neceſſary unavoidable way as the objection ſuppoſeth. For here is the thing; admitting that God Almighty in his government of the world doth not uſually ſtep out into extraordinary actions, beyond or above the courſe of nature, yet he has ſo contrived the courſe of nature that ſuch events as we ſpeak of may be hindered or may be forwarded; may come to paſs, or may not come

come to paſs; may happen this way, or may happen another way, as men behave themſelves towards God, and as he ſees beſt for them; and this without any violence done to nature, or without tranſgreſſing the laws of it. So that there is room enough, abundantly enough left for our endeavours and our prayers; and as we uſe them, or uſe them not, the ſucceſs and the event ſhall prove accordingly.

It is a great miſtake to think that the affairs of this outward world are managed wholly by mechanical powers, or, which is the ſame thing, by neceſſary cauſes. No, the wills and the actions of mankind have a mighty influence upon them, as is viſible in ſome of thoſe things I mentioned, as peace and war, health and ſickneſs, victory and overthrow.—And no body, I hope, will ſay that the actions of men are neceſſary. But beſides, the angels and ſeparate ſpirits who are in a great number every where, and are the inviſible miniſters of God's providence, have not only an influence over the actions of mankind, by ſuggeſting to their minds a thouſand things that perhaps they would otherwiſe never have thought of; but they have alſo a mighty influence over thoſe powers of nature that ſeem to act moſt neceſſarily: I mean the elements, as we call them, from whoſe various combinations ariſe ſtorms and tempeſts, fruitful and barren ſeaſons, ſickly or healthful years: Both theſe cauſes, I ſay, the free, as well as the neceſſary agents of this world, thoſe inviſible miniſters of God do ſo diſpoſe, and direct, and order, as that they ſhall produce ſuch events as God ſees fitteſt for mankind, whether it be by way of judgment, as a puniſhment of their ſins, or by way of mercy, as a teſtimony of God's acceptance of them. And all this too comes to paſs in a natural way, that is, it is

the common and uſual method of God's providence in the government of the world. But then I add further, whenever there happens a juſt occaſion for God to excerciſe his extraordinary power above or againſt the courſe of nature, he will not fail to do that likewiſe; and abundance of inſtances of that in his government of the world he hath given us, and, for any thing that I know, doth yet give us.

Theſe things conſidered, we have no reaſon to imagine that becauſe things are commonly diſpenſed to us by the miniſtry of ſecond cauſes, of which we can give ſome natural account, that therefore God had no hand in bringing ſuch things to paſs in the world, but that they come fortuitouſly or neceſſarily, and cannot be hindered or forwarded by the prayers or endeavours of mankind: no, certainly; tho' the effect, whatever it was, was immediately produced by ſecond cauſes, yet it was God, that, by the miniſters of his providence, laid the train of thoſe things, and ſo ordered and managed them, as that righteous and good ends ſhould be ſerved by the effects that they produce. So that, as our bleſſed Saviour hath told us, not ſo much *as a ſparrow doth fall to the ground*, Matt. x. 29 but that it may be truly ſaid, it is by the will of our heavenly Father.

To conclude this point therefore: Since all events whatſoever do ſo abſolutely depend upon the will and pleaſure of God, it plainly follows, that it is ſo far from being needleſs or impertinent to have recourſe to ſolemn humiliation, and faſting and prayer, in the time of public danger, as the objection would infer, that, on the contrary, the uſe of theſe is indiſpenſably neceſſary, if we would have our affairs to proſper. Theſe being the means which both the light of nature hath

hath directed mankind to for that purpoſe, and accordingly hath been always practiſed by all nations who have had any ſenſe of God and his providence, and the means likewiſe which God himſelf has appointed, and to the efficacy of which he has given many teſtimonies in his holy word, as I have already ſhewn.

II. Having thus done with the firſt head of my diſcourſe, I now proceed to the other, *viz.* What is required to the due performance of public faſting and prayer that ſo they may be effectual for the averting the judgments of God, and obtaining his bleſſing.

I have already read to you the account that the prophet has here given us concerning the behaviour of the Ninevites upon this occaſion. He tells us, that *they believed God, and* therefore *they proclaimed a faſt*, chap. 3. ver. 5. That *they cried mightily unto the Lord*, and that *they turned every one from his evil way, and from the violence that was in his hands*, ver. 8. So that if we take our meaſures from the Ninevites, we muſt ſay that there are three things neceſſary to make our public faſting and prayer effectual to the ends they are deſigned for:

Firſt, That our faſting do proceed from a truly religious principle, that is to ſay, from a deep ſenſe of our ſins againſt God, and the puniſhment we deſerve for them.

Secondly, That our prayers for his mercy be very earneſt and importunate; that we *cry mightily unto the Lord*, as the Ninevites here did.

Thirdly, That our faſting and prayer be accompanied with ſerious reſolution to reform our lives, *by turning from our evil way.*

Give me leave to ſpeak very briefly to theſe three things.

I.

1. Firſt of all; if we expect to have our ſolemn faſting at this time effectual to the ends it is deſigned for, it is neceſſary that it do proceed from a truly religious principle; that is to ſay, from a deep ſenſe of our ſins againſt God, and the puniſhment we deſerve for them. Faſting, as it is a bare abſtinence from meat, ſignifies nothing in God's account; nay, though we added ſackcloth and aſhes to it, no more than any other indifferent action of human life. That which gives it its virtue, is the inward humiliation of our ſouls before God for our own ſins, and the ſins of the nation; and the giving the beſt expreſſions we can, by thus puniſhing and afflicting our bodies, that we are truly grieved and afflicted for having offended God, and are deeply ſenſible of what we have deſerved from him upon that account. We do hereby declare that we judge and ſentence ourſelves, that we may prevent the judgment of the Lord. This is the true notion of religious faſting. Without this, it is a ſacrifice without an heart; nay, it is declared by God to be an abomination to him. *Is this*, ſays he, *the faſt that I have choſen? A day for a man to afflict his ſoul? Is it to bow down his head like a bullruſh, and ſpread ſackcloth and aſhes under him? Wilt thou call this a faſt and an acceptable day unto the Lord?* Iſaiah lviii. 5. No; if the faſt go no further than this, it is ſo far from being acceptable, that he declares by the ſame prophet, that *it was iniquity, and the ſolemn meeting of this kind, his ſoul could not away with*, chap. i. 13.

It would be well if all of us here preſent, who pretend this day to keep a ſolemn faſt to the Lord, would a little examine ourſelves upon this point. Do we really come with thoſe qualifications which are required to make a faſt a true act of religion, and ſuch as will

gain God's acceptance? Do not ſome of us faſt merely for faſting ſake, being no more concerned what the ſtate of their ſouls is towards God, than if they were going to a feaſt? Do not ſome of us appear here without any inward ſenſe in the leaſt either of their ſins, or of the judgments of God, which hang over our heads; deſigning more by this their faſting to ſhew reſpect to the queen and her proclamation, than to take any occaſion therefrom to examine their own lives, and to lay their ſins to heart, and ſeriouſly to repent of them for their own, and the nation's ſake? If there be any here whoſe conſcience cannot anſwer them that they come with better deſigns and diſpoſitions, they might as well forbear their faſting at this time; for it is certain the publick is likely to receive little benefit from it. If we would obſerve a faſt to any purpoſe, it is fit that we come to it with a great zeal and concernment for the nation of which we are members, and alſo with a hearty ſorrow for our ſins, and a juſt apprehenſion of the wrath and diſpleaſure of God, that we have incurred by them. If we have any concernment for our country, it will ſhew itſelf that way. We ſhall not only be ſenſible of our own tranſgreſſions, and the perſonal guilt we have thereby contracted, but of the ſins and the guilt in which we and the whole kingdom lie involved. We ſhall ſadly conſider how we have abuſed God's mercies, and how we have defeated the ends of his judgments. What ungrateful returns we have made for all his kindneſſes, and how we have multiplied our tranſgreſſions againſt heaven with an high hand. And we ſhall not eaſily *ſpeak peace to ourſelves when there is no peace*, Ezek. xiii. 10. but being apprehenſive of what our ſins have deſerved, we ſhall ſtand in continual fear, leſt God ſhould viſit them upon us. And certainly we of this

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nation have great reaſons for that fear; not but that I hope, as bad as we are, we may be as good as ſome of the other nations, that we have now to deal with. Tho' whether this be true or no, God Almighty only knows, who alone ſearcheth the heart, and when the iniquities of a people are at the height, knows how, or in what manner to viſit them. But, I ſay, conſidering how long God hath ſpared us, and how long we have enjoyed the bleſſings of peace at home, and all manner of plenty and proſperity (tho' perhaps with many fears and juſt apprehenſions of danger) when moſt of our neighbours have taſted the cup of God's fury, groaning under the cruelties and miſeries of wars, and perſecutions, and deſolations; and conſidering the great privileges and advantages we have for many years enjoyed of a glorious light of the goſpel, and all the outward means of grace that could be deſired for the eternal ſalvation of our ſouls, and that above any nation under heaven; and withal how unprofitable we have been under thoſe means, and what little effect they have had upon us for the bettering our manners or reforming us to a ſober chriſtian converſation: and conſidering, laſtly, how very wicked a great many of us are; what a world of open and groſs ſins and impieties do reign among us; what a lewd, and prophane, and atheiſtical ſpirit ſeems to have gone out among us, and to prevail upon us; what a deal of hypocriſy is every where to be met with, men making a mighty noiſe with religion, and being zealous, even to bigotry, for that mode of it which they have taken up, and yet not having one drachm of inward ſenſe of that which it obligeth them to; it being merit enough to ſanctify all their other actions be they never ſo unchriſtian, if they can but with the Jews cry aloud, *The temple of the Lord*, &c.

Jer. vii. 4. I ſay, conſidering theſe things, is there not reaſon enough to be apprehenſive of God's judgments? and to fear, leſt he ſhould decree upon us what he once ſaid by his prophet, *Shall I not be avenged of ſuch a nation as this?* Jer. v. 9. at leaſt is there not reaſon enough for us all on this day to proſtrate ourſelves in the greateſt humility before God, heartily bewailing our own ſins and the ſins of our country? and earneſtly begging of God, with devout prayers and tears, that he would be merciful unto us; that he would not deal with us according to our deſerts; but that he would ſpare our nation, and neither give us up to be ruined by our own inteſtine diviſions, nor deliver us over as a prey to our enemies?

2. And that leads me to the ſecond thing which is required to the due performance of a ſolemn faſt and humiliation, *viz.* Fervent and importunate application to the throne of grace for the averting thoſe judgments we have reaſon to fear, and beſtowing thoſe bleſſings upon us we ſtand in need of. Indeed if we be ſo truly ſenſible of our ſins and of our danger as we ought to be, it will neceſſarily put us upon earneſt prayers and ſupplications to God Almighty: that he would be pleaſed to pardon thoſe ſins for which we humble ourſelves before him, and ſtop thoſe puniſhments we are conſcious they have deſerved. This was one article of the proclamation that was made in Nineveh for the publick faſt, *viz. That every one ſhould cry mightily unto the Lord*, chap. iii. 8. And great reaſon there is for ſo doing; for hereby we do moſt properly acknowledge God to be the Lord and governor of the world; and that he is the diſpoſer of all events that happen to us, and that we do not truſt in ourſelves, nor in our own powers, nor in the ſtrength of our allies, nor in any arm

arm of fleſh, but that we wholly depend upon him for all the good we hope for.

Let us all therefore, on this day, devoutly throw ourſelves at the footſtool of God, and moſt earneſtly ſupplicate his divine Majeſty, that he would be merciful to us, and our country; that he would pardon our ſins, and turn his anger from us. Let every one of us this day take up the prieſt's office, and ſay the words of the prophet—*Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen ſhould rule over them: wherefore ſhould they ſay among the heathen, where is their God?* Joel. ii. 17. Let us pray heartily that God would, *in this our day*, give us a true *underſtanding of the things that belong to our peace*, Luke xix. 42. That he would incline the heart of every one in this kingdom to love and hold faſt the true religion, and to live according to it: that he would heal all our breaches, and put a ſtop to our unaccountable diviſions, which above all other things do threaten the publick peace and ſafety: that he would bleſs and preſerve the queen, and direct all her counſels, and inſpire all who under her have the management of the publick affairs, with ſuch true wiſdom, and piety, and zeal, for the common good, that, laying aſide all private intereſts and applications, all their aims may be directed to the promoting the glory of god, and the peace and tranquillity of the kingdom. That he would command the winds and the ſeas that they do us no further miſchief. That he would give a bleſſing to the undertakings of her majeſty's forces, and thoſe of her allies. And laſtly, that he would grant us a happy peace, that *we being delivered from the hands of our enemies, may ſerve him without fear, in holineſs and righteouſneſs before him all the days of our life*, Luke i. 74, 75.

All theſe things we may and we ought to pray for, and to pray for them heartily, and earneſtly, and importunately. And tho' we cannot poſitively aſſure ourſelves that every particular of them ſhall be granted upon our prayers, becauſe perhaps God ſees that we of this nation are not qualified for all theſe bleſſings; the greater number of us putting a ſtop to the efficacy of the publick prayers for thoſe things, by their obſtinate reſolution to continue in their wicked practices, and affronts to God Almighty; and becauſe perhaps God ſees that it is better for us to be exerciſed with difficulties at home, and with dangers from abroad, for the trial of all ſorts of men among us; yet this we may depend upon, that our hearty prayers to God for thoſe things will not be in vain: they will have ſuch ſucceſs, if they be affectionate and hearty, as that the nation will be much the better for them; but to be ſure they who put them up, will find their account in them. And no doubt but we ſhall have the good effect of our prayers, if

3. In the third and laſt place, they be accompanied with ſerious reſolutions to reform our lives, and to turn from our evil ways. This is the third thing required to the due performance of publick faſting and prayer. And indeed it is the main thing of all. This was that which God eſpecially took notice of in the faſt of the Ninevites, and for which he reverſed his ſentence of deſtroying their city. The text tells us, that *God ſaw that they turned from their evil way, and therefore he repented of the evil that he ſaid he would do unto them; and he did it not*, chap. iii. 10. Their turning from their evil way here mentioned, is, I conceive, to be underſtood of their ſolemn reſolutions and purpoſes to turn from them; of the reality of which they might at that time

time give ſome inſtances and expreſſions. But of the fruits of thoſe reſolutions and purpoſes, and how they afterwards practiſed, Jonah the prophet ſtayed not long enough to be a witneſs of: and for that reaſon it is that I ſay here, that our ſolemn faſting and prayer ought to be accompanied with a ſerious reſolution to forſake our ſins, without mentioning the actual forſaking of them. Indeed, I take it, that this is ſufficient to obtain God's acceptance of our faſting and prayers. And truly more than this we cannot do at any ſingle time, and yet leſs than this, it will be an affront to God to offer to him. All our faſting and prayers will ſignify nothing without a real intention to forſake the ſins we faſt for, and to live ſuch a life as to make us worthy of the bleſſings we pray for. *If I incline to wickedneſs in my heart*, ſays the palſmiſt, *the Lord will not hear me*, Pſal. lxvi. 18. *We know*, ſaith the man in the goſpel, *that God heareth not ſinners*, John ix. 3. Nay, God doth not only not hear ſinners, but their prayers are an abomination to him. *The ſacrifice of the wicked*, ſays Solomon, *are an abomination to the Lord*, Prov. xv. 3.

But what then, are not wicked men to faſt with us, and to pray with us? Yes, certainly. How elſe ſhould they ever come to be good? But they muſt leave off their wickedneſs, or if that cannot be done at once, or in a moment, they muſt at leaſt ſincerely purpoſe and reſolve againſt it, and then put up their prayers to God. If they do not do this, they affront God. Inſtead of praying to him, they defy him, and put a mockery upon him. For is it not a plain mockery? Is it not a defiance of God's juſtice and holineſs, to come, for inſtance, to humble myſelf before God for the ſins of the nation, and to pretend ſeriouſly to beg pardon for my

own perſonal ſins, my whoredoms, my adulteries, my extortions, and oppreſſions, my drunkenneſs and debaucheries, my hypocriſy in pretending a zeal for religion, when yet I neither believe nor practiſe any thing of it; and yet, at the ſame time, I know in my own heart that I mean not to forſake one of thoſe ſins, but to take the next occaſion that offers itſelf to commit them over again? Till therefore we can ſeriouſly reſolve to quit our evil courſes, to forſake every known wilful open ſin, which we are conſcious to ourſelves that we live in, let us not think ourſelves qualified to join in any publick faſt, or to put up our prayers to God, either for ourſelves or for the nation.—The ſum of all that I have ſaid upon this head is elegantly expreſſed by the prophet Iſaiah, part of whoſe words I have already quoted, and ſhall now conclude with the reſt. *This is the faſt that I have choſen, to looſe the bands of wickedneſs*, &c. chap. lviii. ver. 6, 7, 8, 9.

God Almighty give us grace thus to faſt, and thus to pray, that ſo we and our country may have the benefit of it in this world, and that it may be a means of promoting our eternal ſalvation in the other.

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SERMON VI.

The ſeveral cauſes of mens miſtakes about the terms of their ſalvation, and the reaſons why they deceive themſelves into vain opinions of their own ſecurity.

1 JOHN iii. 7.

Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doth righteouſneſs is righteous, even as he is righteous.

ST. John's deſign in theſe words, and in the greateſt part of this chapter, is to convince thoſe to whom he writes, of the abſolute neceſſity there is of living a pure and holy life, if ever they mean to go to heaven. And this in oppoſition to thoſe gnoſtic principles that went about in thoſe days, which pretended to reconcile chriſtianity with immoral practices. To this ends he tells them in the third verſe, that *whoſoever hath the hope in him* of being happy with Chriſt, at his ſecond appearance, *muſt purify himſelf even as he is pure.* In the ſixth verſe he tells them, that it is in vain to call themſelves Chriſt's diſciples, if they indulge themſelves in any ſin, for *who-*

ſoever abideth in Chriſt, ſinneth not: and *whoſoever ſinneth* (that is, lives in any courſe of ſin) *hath not ſeen Chriſt, nor known him,* how much ſoever he pretends to the knowledge of him. In my text, which is the next verſe, he goes on to the ſame purpoſe, *Little children,* &c. that is to ſay, he only ſhall be accounted righteous before God, who practiſeth righteouſneſs in all his converſation; who is righteous in the ſame manner (tho' not in the ſame degree) as Chriſt was. And, laſtly, in the tenth verſe, *In this,* ſays he, *the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the devil: whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.* All this is to ſhew how inſeparable true holineſs is from true chriſtianity, and how indiſpenſably neceſſary it is that they who would live happily in the other world, ſhould live righteouſly, and ſoberly, and godly in this.

But that which I at this time take notice of, and mean to inſiſt upon, is that preface with which St. John introduceth his propoſition in my text. *Little children, let no man deceive you.* If you aſk what I gather from hence; I anſwer thus. This caution of his, ſeems to imply, that altho' of all the deceits in the world thoſe which are about the terms of our ſalvation be the moſt dangerous, yet nevertheleſs this is a matter wherein people are wonderfully apt to be deceived. Mankind are ſtrangely prone to find out ways to cheat themſelves and others into a belief that they may appear righteous in God's account, tho' they are not righteous as Chriſt is, and conſequently that they may go to heaven at laſt, tho' they continue in their ſins all their days: and therefore there is very great need that they ſhould be often put in mind of, and often warned againſt theſe deceits. This I ſay is that which ſeems to be intimated in this preface or caution of the apoſtle.

I am the more ready to draw this inference from this paſſage, becauſe I obſerve, that when St. Paul in his writings has occaſion to treat of this argument, he is wont to give the ſame caution, and in the ſame language; *Know ye not that the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators nor adulterers, nor,* &c. *ſhall inherit the kingdom of God,* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Again. *This ye know, that no whoremonger,* &c. *hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Chriſt. Let no man deceive you with vain words.* Eph. v. 5, 6. Laſtly, *be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap. If a man ſow to the fleſh, he ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption: but if he ſow to the ſpirit, he ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting,* Gal. vi. 7, 8. What now can be the meaning of all theſe cautions, not to be deceived, unleſs the apoſtles did apprehend that people were very apt to be impoſed upon in this matter, and to take up notions and fancies that they might go to heaven without living a virtuous and holy life.

But in truth the matter of fact doth ſufficiently ſpeak itſelf, and there is no need to have recourſe to the authority of the apoſtles for the proof of it. As Chriſt's religion goes in the world, God knows, too many of all perſuaſions, and in all communions, are not only in danger of being led away, but are actually led away with this deceit that we are cautioned againſt. To go no further than our own country, in which we have reaſon to hope there are as many ſincere good chriſtians as in any part of Europe of the ſame dimenſions; yet, what a great number we have of thoſe who profeſs Chriſt's religion among us, who are ſo far from living up to that holineſs and virtue, that our Lord has required of

his diſciples, that we may truly ſay their lives are a ſcandal to the goſpel of Chriſt! And yet of this great number of profeſſors who live thus viciouſly, and, as I may ſay, in contradiction to their religion, yet there are not many, or rather very few of them, but hope to go to heaven. Not one of a thouſand in any communion thinks himſelf a reprobate, or that he ſhall periſh everlaſtingly. But they generally believe that they ſhall do well enough in the other world. Something or other they have wherewith to bear up their ſpirits againſt all the fears of damnation, and to encourage them to hope for heaven, tho' they cannot but, at the ſame time, acknowledge, that their lives and converſations are inconſiſtent with the religion they profeſs.

What now muſt we ſay of all theſe? Are they not perfectly under the deluſion we are ſpeaking of? Is it not plain they hope to be righteous in God's account, without doing righteouſneſs; and that they hope to be ſaved by ſome other way than by living a holy life? Certain it is. And therefore great reaſon is there that people ſhould be often called upon, ſhould have often this caution of the apoſtle's preſſed upon them; *Little children, let no man deceive you.*

But it may juſtly be wonder'd at ſince God hath ſo poſitively declared himſelf in his revelation to mankind by Jeſus Chriſt, *That without true holineſs no man is to expect future happineſs*, Heb. xii. 14. how it comes to paſs that chriſtians generally, chriſtians of all communions, are ſo very apt to hope for ſalvation without holineſs; nay, how is it poſſible for them, conſidering the plain declarations of the goſpel, to imagine that any thing ſhort of ſincere virtue ſhould carry them to heaven? To give ſome anſwer to this enquiry is what I deſign now to do.

And here I ſhall lay before you ſome of the principal things which I take to be the grounds and occaſions of mens deceits in this matter, hoping that the expoſing of them may be of ſome uſe for the preventing ſuch deceits.

1. And the firſt thing that occurs to me among the ſeveral cauſes of mens miſtakes about the terms of their ſalvation, is, our being apt to meaſure the nature of God and his proceedings with us by thoſe rules by which we are wont to govern ourſelves in caſes where we are concern'd. I grant, indeed, in all caſes where we proceed according to the rules of right reaſon, we may juſtly conclude, that God will ſo proceed with us in the like caſes. But now, in this low degenerate ſtate we are in in this world, we have got God knows how many falſe principles, which as they are apt to influence us in our making a judgment upon ourſelves and our dealings with others, ſo are we apt, upon their account, to fanſy that all God's dealings with us muſt be ſuitable thereunto.

I will give two or three inſtances of this. In the firſt place we in our natural tempers are not much inclined to be hard or ſevere upon any man, except in a caſe where we ourſelves have received injury from him. This now leads us to fanſy, that ſince God receives no real injury from any man's ſins, therefore he will not be much concern'd in the puniſhment of them, and we may hope to be everlaſtingly happy hereafter, tho' we be not holy and virtuous in this life. For thus we reaſon: I, that am far leſs pitiful than God is, cannot find in my heart to make any perſon miſerable (if it was in my power to do it) that hath never injured me, tho' he have otherwiſe behaved himſelf very fooliſhly and very wickedly: how then

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can I imagine that the infinitely kind and good God will give any man over to deſtruction, tho' he may have been very wicked in ſome reſpects, conſidering that God hath ſuffered no injury by him. For all the ſins and wickedneſs in the world doth not in the leaſt touch God Almighty, that is, he receives no damage from them. His infinite glory and happineſs is as perfect and undiſturbed as if none of them had ever happened. How therefore can he concern himſelf ſo ſeverely to puniſh them, as the preachers talk in their pulpits?—But now it will be enough to expoſe the falſeneſs and vanity of this ſort of reaſoning to conſider, that God in his dealings with mankind is not to be looked upon as a party, but as a governor, and as a judge. It is true, God ſuffers nothing by all the wickedneſſes and villainies of men or devils, were they ten thouſand times greater than they are. But yet it concerns his juſtice, as he is ſupreme ruler and governor of the world, to make a diſcrimination between good and evil: to reward all thoſe who ſincerely endeavour to obſerve his laws, (which are all for the good of mankind) and, on the other ſide, to puniſh all thoſe who wilfully and impenitently tranſgreſs them. For if God did not do this, how could he approve himſelf to be that king and governor of mankind, that righteous judge of all the earth, which he hath declared himſelf to be. Sure I am, this cannot be denied to be good reaſoning, if we put the caſe as to earthly rulers or magiſtrates. Suppoſe a civil magiſtrate ſhould have a criminal brought before him, accuſed, for inſtance, of murder, burglary, or the like, and the fact is proved, would you not have him in that caſe to pronounce the ſentence that the law has awarded to all ſuch malefactors? certainly you muſt

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think it infinitely reaſonable he ſhould, tho' yet he is no more injured or affronted with what the malefactor hath done, than you are injured when the ſtory is told you.

Thus again, to give another inſtance of our judging of God's ways by our own: the temper of mankind, as it generally ſtands, is apt to be pleaſed with little things, and diſpleaſed with little things alſo. A little outward reſpect or civility from any perſon, let him otherwiſe be a bad man, has the power to gain our friendſhip, or at leaſt to buy off our diſpleaſure againſt him, provided he hath done us no harm. And, on the other ſide, a little thing, if it thwart our intereſts and inclinations, has the power to diſoblige us, and to make us angry with the man that doth it, tho' otherwiſe he be a worthy honeſt man. Now finding this to be our own temper, we are apt to think that God Almighty muſt be of the ſame, and accordingly we moſt commonly repreſent him to ourſelves as one who is pleaſed with little things, and diſpleaſed with little things alſo. And from hence do proceed theſe two different effects; that one ſort of men, who are of a timorous melancholy temper, are always fanſying that God is angry with them for every the leaſt thing that ſeems to them to be irregular. And, on the other ſide, another ſort of men who are of a more ſanguine complexion, are apt to believe that any ſort of deference or outward reſpect they pay to God's commands, or the commands of the church for God's ſake, tho' it be but in ſmall inſtances, that this will atone for all other ſins whatſoever. But now both theſe ſorts of perſons are mightily miſtaken; for God is not ſo eaſily diſpleaſed with every ſmall fault, eſpecially when he ſees that fault proceeds from the infirmity

firmity of our nature, which we cannot help; nor is he at all to be bribed or bought into a good liking of us, by any outward ſervice, tho' it be never ſo much of his own appointment, unleſs the whole man be entirely devoted to him: unleſs there be a thorough conformity of a man's mind, and will, and actions, to thoſe eternal and unchangeable laws of holineſs and virtue, which he hath preſcribed us to walk by. For the effectual curing therefore of all ſuperſtition in our minds, (for I muſt confeſs I have no other notion of ſuperſtition, but that it is a fanſying that God is pleaſed with little things, and diſpleaſed with little things likewiſe:) I ſay, for the removing this wicked principle out of our minds, let us always take care to repreſent God to ourſelves as a being the moſt perfectly and immutably holy, and pure, and good, that is poſſible to be conceived. Let us frame ſuch ideas of him, as to believe that nothing in the earth is ſo contradictory to his bleſſed nature, as folly and ſin; and that he never acts arbitrarily, but always loves and hates, rewards and puniſhes, according as the object he has to deal with hath a ſuitableneſs and agreement with his holy nature, or a diſagreeableneſs and contrariety to it. And therefore certainly whatever is wicked or impure can never be acceptable to him, no outward advantages of dreſs, no cringes, no compliments can render it lovely in his eyes. On the other ſide, true and ſubſtantial virtue and goodneſs in the mind, tho' attended with never ſo many weakneſſes and failings, will for ever be his delight, and will for ever be rewarded by him. And conſequently it is in vain to hope the gaining of his favour by any thing in the world that comes ſhort of true goodneſs, and they who have true goodneſs,

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ſhall never need to fear the loſing of his favour, tho' otherwiſe their performances be attended with many imperfections.

To give one inſtance more of our judging of God's ways by our own ways, and then I leave this head. We are apt in our tempers to have different notions and apprehenſions of things paſt and preſent, and from hence we are often led to believe that God will have ſo likewiſe; and this is another ground of miſtake about the conditions of our ſalvation. To explain myſelf: when we have newly done a thing that our conſcience declares againſt as a great ſin, we are ſtruck with a pungent ſenſe of the wickedneſs of the action, and we accuſe ourſelves moſt heinouſly for it, and are ſufficiently ſenſible what we deſerve at God's hands for having thus notoriouſly broken his ſacred laws. But now this very fact that was thus horrid in its appearance, when it was firſt done, yet after ſome time, either all our firſt impreſſions concerning it are worn away, and the thing is quite forgot; or, if it be remember'd, yet looking upon it as done long ago, we are not much concerned about it: and we are apt to believe that God hath ſuch apprehenſions of the thing as we have. The ſtinging tormenting remembrance of the fact is gone from us, and ſo we too readily incline to believe that a very ſlight remembrance of it remains with God likewiſe. Now by this means it is no difficult matter for a man who hath not much uſed himſelf to inſpection, to bring a vaſt number of ſins, and thoſe aggravated with all odious circumſtances, into a very little account: the greateſt part of them ſhall perhaps ſlip his memory, and of thoſe that he remembers, the heinous aggravating circumſtances are perhaps forgot. But if he ſhould remember

ber any thing of them, yet he cannot now look upon the ſins with a quarter of that horror that he found in himſelf when he newly committed them, by which means here is a vaſt great ſum which a man has to account for before God, dwindled in a manner into a trifle. And ſure God is of the ſame mind too; and ſince a little repentance will ſerve to ſatisfy a man, why ſhould it not ſatisfy God alſo? But now here is our miſtake: though we be ſhallow creatures, and eaſily loſe our impreſſions of things, and eaſily forget our paſt actions, yet God falls not under theſe imputations of weakneſs. All things are preſent to him alike at all times: and he has the ſame ſenſe of mens actions, and the ſame reſentments againſt them (if they were bad) an hundred years after they were done, that he had the very moment they were done. They are neither forgotten, nor the malignity of them leſſened in his account by any tract of time. The way therefore to keep ourſelves from being impoſed upon by ſuch fancies, is this: let us imagine that all the ſins of our life (I ſpeak not of the little daily ſins which every man commits, but all thoſe ſins) which we looked upon as heinous, and upon which our conſcience flew in our faces when we had been guilty of them: I ſay, let us imagine all theſe ſins, together with all their aggravating circumſtances, and all the ſevere and bitter reflections we at that time made thereupon; imagine, I ſay, all theſe to be at once preſent to our minds, and to affect us in the ſame proportion all together as every one of them did ſingly, *viz.* that all the grief, and anguiſh, and tormenting reflections we felt in ourſelves upon account of any one of them ſhould not now be loſt, but bear a part of that grievous load they would lay upon us when we took

took them all together. What ſort of thoughts now ſhould we in that caſe have of ourſelves? Sure I am, the very beſt of us would not have much comfort, but the worſer ſort of us muſt ſink into deſperation. But this is our comfort, God will be merciful to all upon their true repentance, and will never remember againſt them their former iniquities. Nay, and this I think I may ſay further, God will not deal more ſeverely with the worſt of us than we ourſelves ſhould in our conſcience think we deſerved, were all our ſins and tranſgreſſions, with the true circumſtances of them, ſet in the ſame view and order before us that they are in his eternal mind. And thus much of the firſt head, of things which occaſion our miſtakes and deceits about this matter of the terms of our ſalvation.

2. But in the ſecond place, another thing that is apt to make us leſs dread the conſequences of a wicked life, and to encourage our hopes of heaven upon very eaſy conditions, is the vaſt number of delinquents that God has to puniſh, if he will puniſh all who do not lead ſuch lives as the goſpel preſcribes. For thus we reaſon; tho' my own conſcience tells me I am not ſo good as I ought to be, yet I have reaſon to believe that I am not worſe than the generality of thoſe I converſe with, and yet they hope to be happy hereafter, or if they be not, Lord, how few ſhall be ſaved! Sure God will not ſend to hell ſuch a prodigious multitude of ſouls, as he muſt be ſuppoſed to do, if he ſave none but the truly virtuous and religious: for at this rate, hell will be very full, and heaven will be extremely empty. To ſpeak plainly now to this. If thoſe people who reaſon in this manner be honeſt and well-meaning chriſtians, and do in the main of their lives endeavour to ſerve God, and to live righteouſly

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and ſoberly among their neighbours, tho' yet their lives are not ſo ſtrict, or ſo devout, or ſo perfect, that they can ſatisfy themſelves that they have attained to thoſe degrees of piety and virtue that the goſpel ſeems to require of them: I ſay, if this be their condition, I would not willingly deprive them of the comfort of this reaſoning of theirs: not that there is any force in their argument, but becauſe we have really reaſon to hope well of theſe men, and of ſuch as they are. And I do believe there is a great number of ſuch in the world, men who are honeſt and ſincere in the main, and do endeavour to approve themſelves to God, but are yet in a low and imperfect ſtate of virtue. Now as to theſe, I ſay, I would by no means diſcourage them, only deſire them for God's ſake, and for their own peace ſake, to take a little more pains, and to break looſe from that weight which hangs upon them, thoſe ſins which do now ſo eaſily beſet them. This they may certainly do, if they will apply their minds to it, and by what means they may make their calling and election ſure to themſelves, which at preſent is uncertain. But now having ſaid this, I add further; for any man that hath no ſenſe of religion, or who lives in a ſtupid, ſenſual, or worldly life, with little regard to God or the concernments of his ſoul, or who obſtinately perſeveres in any courſe of open ſin againſt his conſcience; for any ſuch man to reaſon after this ſort, or to make uſe of this argument of the multitude of offenders for the comforting himſelf that he ſhall eſcape well enough, is one of the moſt impudent things that can be. For admit that the number of ſuch wicked people as he is, was as great as he ſuppoſeth it to be (as we hope it is not) yet ſhall the number of offenders affrighten the juſt judge and go-

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vernor of the world from executing his righteous laws upon them? It often indeed happens among men, that the multitude of criminals is a ſecurity to them from puniſhment; for the greatneſs of their number may make it formidable to the magiſtrate to grapple with them, and therefore for reaſons of ſtate there is a neceſſity of conniving at the moſt, and making examples of a few. But is this any reaſon for God Almighty to ſpare inſolent rebels? That God that made the world with his breath, and can with the ſame breath turn it into nothing? That God who receives no profit or advantage by our utmoſt ſervices, nor can ſuffer any diminution of his infinite glory and bleſſedneſs, tho' we and all mankind were utterly deſtroyed? I ſay, with ſuch a God as this, can it be urged as an argument to have pity on offenders, to ſay that they are too many to be puniſhed? It is rather a blaſphemy to name it. And then as for that ſuggeſtion, that after this way of dealing with mankind, hell would indeed be full, but heaven would be empty; let them not trouble themſelves about that. It is to be hoped God has more good people in the world than they (who meaſure other folks by themſelves) are aware of. And thouſands, and ten thouſands, whom they never think of, *ſhall at the laſt day come from the eaſt, and from the weſt, and from all the quarters under heaven, and ſit down with Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, when* theſe wicked *children of the kingdom*, who had ſo many advantages above the reſt of mankind, *ſhall be caſt out*, Mat. viii. 11, 12. Yet further, if we ſhould admit the greateſt part of mankind to be as bad as they would have them, to be atheiſts, or knaves, or hypocrites; nay, if we ſhould ſuppoſe all mankind to be devils incarnate,

nate, yet I could by no means yield, that for all this hell would be near ſo full as heaven. For how many ſoever the devils and wicked men be, there is no doubt in the world, but there are abundantly more (I was going to ſay infinitely more) happy and pure ſpirits who never departed from God, and who now do, and ever ſhall inhabit thoſe vaſt and glorious manſions above, than the number of that infernal crew can amount to.

3. Another thing that leads us often into deceits, by making us think better of our condition than we ought to do, is our aptneſs to meaſure our actions, not by the intrinſick goodneſs or evilneſs that is in them, but by the popular opinions that go about concerning them.

Thus for inſtance, when we find that there are ſundry practices frequently and commonly uſed among men, which tho' they are expreſly againſt the letter of God's law, do not yet found very ill among the men of the world, nor is there any mark of infamy put upon them, we are apt to conclude from hence, that theſe practices, tho' they be ſins in ſome ſort, yet ſo ſmall they are, that we cannot doubt but they will be eaſily paſſed by when we come to make our accounts with God. This, I ſay, is a great temptation to indulge ourſelves in many ſins, and yet for all that to believe that all things are right with us. For who is there that is led by this ſort of principles, that can think himſelf much concerned to avoid that action which he ſees every day to be ſo inoffenſively practiſed; nay, perhaps there is not only no blemiſh, no diſreputation doth attend it, but among many it is thought allowable, and by ſome commendable.

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I muſt confeſs I do think it is this taking our eſtimates of virtue and vice from the received opinions of them we converſe with, that does as much miſchief to ſouls, by making them to preſume on God's mercy, while they continue in ſuch practices as are directly contrary to his laws, as any other thing whatſoever. For inſtance, what a world of murders hath the notion of honour that obtains among us been the occaſion of, tho' yet it be the moſt miſhapen unnatural notion of honour that can be. For if a wiſe heathen was to be aſked, which was the more honourable in a gentleman, to paſs by a trifling injury, or to revenge it to death; I dare ſay he would anſwer (I am ſure Socrates and Cicero would ſo have anſwer'd) that it was below a man of honour to take notice of ſuch affronts as now prove the moſt mortal quarrels of the moſt honourable men among chriſtians. What is it that makes lewdneſs and drunkenneſs, and ſuch other debauches, ſo frequently practiſed among us, but only this, the faſhionableneſs of the ſins doth ſo blind our judgments, that we think them excuſable frolicks, how ſeverely ſoever God has declared againſt them. A man would not be prevailed upon to ſwear or to curſe, or to talk profanely, and irreligiouſly in his common converſation, but that the ſin is ſo ordinary, that he believes God will eſtimate the guilt of it, not according to the rigour of his laws, but according to the vogue it hath obtained among men.

Tho' our religion doth moſt ſtrictly forbid back-biting and ſpeaking evil of others, yet ſeeing this is the general entertainment of moſt converſations, one thinks it no great matter to ſtretch a point of duty as to this buſineſs, and he hopes God will eaſily make allowance for it. Thus apt are we to be ſwayed by

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the popular opinions about good or evil actions. But yet for all that, it is of infinitely dangerous conſequence; for whoever frames his life according to this principle, it is ten to one but he runs himſelf into moſt deplorable miſchiefs. For God ſees not as man ſees. The impartial judge of the world will take account of our actions, not according to the opinions of the men of this world, whom we converſed with, but according to their intrinſick goodneſs or turpitude. He will indeed make great allowances for mens ignorance and miſtakes, where they were unavoidable, but there is no reaſon to expect that he ſhould grant any favour in thoſe caſes where men ſaw their duty well enough, and knew likewiſe what ſtreſs God in his word laid upon it; and yet would be bold to tranſgreſs it, becauſe they ſaw other men did. The ſin was a modiſh ſin, and therefore they made a ſlight matter of it.

4. Another occaſion of our deceit in this matter is the general opinion that is entertained about ſins of infirmity. We all know that ſins of infirmity are conſiſtent with a ſtate of ſalvation, otherwiſe none of mankind could be ſaved. For the beſt men are attended with many weakneſſes and imperfections, and have daily occaſion to implore the divine mercy upon the account thereof. *In many things we offend all*, James iii. 2. And in truth, as the ſtate of mankind now is, we may account him the beſt and worthieſt chriſtian (not he who never tranſgreſſeth God's laws, for perhaps there is no ſuch man, but he) who hath the feweſt mixtures of folly and ſin in his life. All this now is true: but becauſe this is true, we will have a great deal more to be ſo, which is not; for finding that the beſt of men have infirmities, and that thoſe infirmities

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ſhall be no bar to their ſalvation, we are apt to conclude, that our ſins, how grievous or how habitual ſoever they be, are but our infirmities likewiſe, and that we may go to heaven for all them. The truth is, to that unreaſonable degree of latitude have we commonly extended ſins of infirmity, or thoſe ſins which are conſiſtent with a ſtate of holineſs and happineſs, that really there are hardly any, but atheiſts, or downright profane irreligious perſons, but may very well ſhelter all the ſins and great miſcarriages of their lives under this comfortable name. For what are thoſe ſins which we call ſins of infirmity, but ſuch ſins (be they in their own nature never ſo heinous) as we do often reſolve againſt, and are perhaps troubled at after we have done them, but which yet we continue in the practice of? There are a great many who have ſo far a ſenſe of religion, that they cannot avoid being troubled and concerned at their wicked lives. It is with ſome reluctancy that they act as they do: and they cannot forbear accuſing themſelves, and perhaps reſolving to do ſo no more: but yet for all that they live never the better: they do not amend one fault for all thoſe convictions and reſolutions. Let the ſins which reign in them be what they will, drunkenneſs, or lewdneſs, or covetouſneſs, or injuſtice, or malice, or neglect of God's worſhip, or the like, yet the next temptation that comes in their way to any of theſe ſins, they ſhall not fail to comply with, tho' it was not a month before that they were troubled at themſelves for living at this rate, and reſolved to forſake theſe courſes for ever. But now all the while they remain in this condition, the ſins they commit muſt needs be ſins of infirmity, becauſe really it is their infirmity and weakneſs that they do not conquer them. Their in-

tentions, their purpoſes, and deſigns, are without doubt right and honeſt, and therefore they cannot doubt but that they ſhall be accepted upon the account of them, tho' they never live up to their good principles, nor conquer any of thoſe ſins they labour under.

This, I ſay, is our common opinion concerning ſins of infirmity. And there is no doubt hundreds of perſons under the protection and ſecurity of this notion mean very well, and live very ill, nay and perhaps die ſo, and yet, after all, think they ſhall go to heaven.

But now all this is extremely falſe reaſoning. It is true, it is the mens weakneſs and infirmity that they live in a courſe of ſin, contrary to all their ſentiments and all their ſerious purpoſes: but yet for all that, if the ſins they live in the practice of be open known ſins, ſuch ſins as are plainly forbid by the laws of the goſpel, and are there declared againſt for ſuch, as ſhall exclude from the kingdom of heaven, they are not ſins of infirmity, but wilful preſumptuous ſins, which the men ſhall anſwer for to God at the peril of their ſouls, with what reluctance ſoever they committed them, or what reſolutions ſoever they uſed to make againſt them. For do not deceive yourſelves, that only is a ſin of infirmity which a man cannot help; that which a man is drawn into thro' ſurprize, or want of time to conſider. But all habits and cuſtoms of ſin fall under another denomination. If a man make it his practice to break God's laws in his actions, and to do ſuch things not only once or twice, but cuſtomarily, as often as the temptation returns, which Chriſt Jeſus hath moſt ſtrictly forbid, let every ſuch man know that theſe ſins of his are not the effects of weakneſs and infirmity, but are the fruits of a wicked unſanctified heart. And till his mind and ſpirit be transformed into a better frame,

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ſo transformed that it hath influence upon his whole life and converſation, ſo as to make that holy and regular, as to the main courſe of it, he is not to think himſelf in the number of God's children, or any ways qualified to receive the rewards of good men in the life to come. Whoſoever ſeriouſly applies himſelf to forſake his ſins, and to lead a holy and a chriſtian life, ſhall certainly (thro' the grace of God, which is never wanting to ſuch perſons) compaſs his purpoſes and deſigns. *Sin ſhall not have dominion over* him, but *he ſhall in all things be conqueror, thro' Chriſt that loveth us*, Rom. vi. 14. viii. 37. But for a man ſtill to be convinced of the evil of his ways, and yet ſtill to continue in thoſe ways, is an argument of a trifling ſoul, which hath never yet ſincerely ſet itſelf to ſeek God, or its own ſalvation.

5. The laſt head I ſhall treat of, as an occaſion of mens deceits about the terms of their ſalvation is this, the miſinterpreting and miſapplying ſome words and phraſes of ſcripture which do ſummarily expreſs the duties required of us in order to our attaining everlaſting happineſs, in ſuch a manner, as to make them conſiſt with a careleſs or wicked life.

There are abundance of inſtances to be given under this head. But I ſhall here only take notice of thoſe two famous things by which the writers of the New-teſtament are every where accuſtomed to expreſs the whole of a chriſtian's duty. Sometimes in that book all that Chriſt and his apoſtles are ſaid to require of men in order to their future happineſs, is only a true faith; and ſometimes only repentance. Thus as for faith; our Saviour ſaith, that *Whoſoever believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; but whoſoever believeth not, ſhall be damned*, Mark xvi. 16. St. Paul tells us over and over again, that *by faith only we are juſtified*, Rom.

iii. 28. v. 1. *&c.* The conſequence now that is drawn from hence is, that whoſoever hath true faith, ſhall certainly be ſaved, ſuppoſing that he die in that condition: and indeed this is undeniably true; as true as the goſpel is. But now abundance of men have ſuch a notion of true faith, as may very well conſiſt with a bad life. For it is in their account either a bare believing of the truths of the goſpel, or a believing as the true catholick church (for ſo the papiſts call the church of Rome) believes, or a reſting and reliance upon Chriſt, and him only, without any merits of their own, or ſuch an application of Chriſt's righteouſneſs and merits to themſelves in particular, as that they are perſuaded they are the elect of God, and that all the promiſes of the goſpel do belong to themſelves. I pray now conſider, how eaſy it is for a man to have any of theſe kinds of faith, and yet continue to be a wicked man. And it is evident, that the generality of chriſtians in the world have no other notion of faith, but what may be reduced to ſome one of theſe four which I have now named.

Thus again, ſometimes all that is required in the goſpel to our ſalvation, is expreſſed by the word repentance. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, Mat. iii. 2. *Except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh*, Luke xiii. 3, 5. *Repent, and be baptized for the remiſſion of your ſins*, Acts ii. 38. *Whenſoever a ſinner repents he ſhall find mercy*, &c. But now how eaſy a matter is it, as things are commonly apprehended, for any man among us to have true repentance? I pray, what do moſt men take repentance to be, but this; a being heartily ſorry when we have done amiſs, and wiſhing we had not done it? And indeed the word imports no more in our Engliſh language. Every man who hath done a thing which he

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is ſorry for, and wiſhes was undone, may be truly ſaid to repent of it, as we uſe the word. Now ſince it is plain that the holy ſcriptures require no more of any man in order to his ſalvation, but either faith or repentance, or, at moſt, faith and repentance together, how eaſy is it for any man, tho' otherwiſe very bad and wicked in his life, upon very ſlender grounds, to believe that he hath both theſe qualities? For who can hinder ſuch a man, when he finds in himſelf that he believes the goſpel, and is heartily deſirous to enjoy all the benefits of Chriſt's paſſion, and is ſorry for his ſins paſt, and wiſhes that he had lived a better life, and purpoſes to do ſo for the future (nay, and dies with thoſe reſolutions:) I ſay, who can hinder ſuch a man from having an expectation of all the mercies of God that are made over to true believers, and true penitents in the goſpel?

All this is very true. But then theſe people run upon this great miſtake all the while, and they ought frequently to be put in mind of it, *viz.* that they apply theſe words, faith and repentance, to quite other purpoſes than the ſcripture deſign'd them: they conſtrue them in a quite different ſenſe and meaning than they were intended. For certainly the ſcripture juſtifying faith, as appears by undeniable arguments, is only ſuch a faith, as, together with the belief of Jeſus Chriſt, produceth a new creature. And certainly the ſcripture repentance is only ſuch a repentance, as, together with the being ſorry for our ſins, produceth a thorough reformation of our manners. Now where-ever theſe two things are effected, that man is ſure of going to heaven: but if either of theſe be wanting, the man has only the ſound of the words for his title to heaven, but he wants that which is the true meaning of them.

This, then, is the concluſion of the whole matter. *Whoever doth righteouſneſs is righteous, and therefore let no man deceive you.* It is in vain to think of any other method of going to heaven, but the plain common way, that is as old as mankind, and bears date with the firſt diſcovery of God's will to them. And that is nothing elſe but a holy, virtuous, religious life; a hearty fear, and love, and truſt in God; a ſincere belief of all his revelations; and, together with that, a ſuitable converſation in all ſobriety, and righteouſneſs, and godlineſs. This is to be *righteous as Chriſt is righteous*; and without this, all our other ſpeculations and contrivances for the ſecuring our future ſtate, will prove perfectly vain and ineffectual.

The thing is ſo plain, that we are very unthinking creatures if ever we be deceived as to this matter; eſpecially ſince we have ſo many cautions given us by Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles, not to ſuffer ourſelves to *be deceived with any vain words*, Eph. v. 6. But, and if we will be deceived, yet nevertheleſs (as the apoſtle tells us) *God will not be mocked*, Gal. vi. 7. There are no tricks to be put upon him. He eaſily ſees thro' all our diſguiſes. He knows whether our heart is right towards him in all things, or whether we would impoſe upon him by ſome little device, that we have learned from the party we converſe with, to get to heaven in a more compendious, expeditious, cheaper way than what the goſpel teaches. *All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do*, Heb. iv. 13. And the rule he hath ſet to himſelf in his dealings with mankind, and from which he will never depart (as the apoſtle tells us) is none other than this, *To reward every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well-doing ſeek for glory, and honour,*

nour, and immortality, eternal life: But to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile: But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God, Rom. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

SERMON VII.

The gospel proofs of a future state; and the nature of the happiness of heaven.

2 TIM. i. 10.

Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, thro' the gospel.

SEE here two of the happy and glorious effects of our Saviour's undertaking for us. By his death, he hath abolished death; and by his resurrection from the dead, he hath brought life and immortality to light. But how are we to understand this saying, that Christ hath abolished death? Do not all men yet die? And doth not St. Paul say, that *the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death?* 1 Cor. xv. 26. This is true: but yet the power and dominion of death, as to all faithful christians, is long ago abolished and destroyed by our Saviour; and that is all that is meant here. St. Paul in his writings usually speaks of death as of a person, as of some mighty conqueror, who had gained an universal empire

empire over mankind; as in truth all mankind, by reaſon of their ſins, were obnoxious for ever, to be held in captivity by it. But now Chriſt by his death hath vanquiſhed this enemy, hath broken thoſe chains and ſet us free from that perpetual vaſſalage: ſo that death ſhall not from henceforth have dominion over us; but we have at this preſent, thro' the merits of Chriſt's ſufferings, an actual right to another life; and when we leave this world (if we perſevere in the faith of Chriſt) ſhall be put into an actual poſſeſſion of it. And that is the full meaning of this expreſſion of Chriſt's aboliſhing death.

As for the other part of the text, upon which I mean to dwell at this time, namely, Chriſt's *bringeth life and immortality to light by the goſpel*, the meaning of that I take to be this, *viz.* That Chriſt, by his goſpel, hath made a much clearer revelation; and by his reſurrection from the dead, given a much ſtronger demonſtration of a future life and immortality than ever the world had before.

We do not think that the people of God, before our Saviour's appearance, were altogether ignorant of this truth, for there is no doubt but the patriarchs of old, and all the pious Jews who lived to our Saviour's time, did expect and hope for a heavenly country after this life; and *looked upon themſelves only as ſtrangers and pilgrims in this world*, Heb. xi. 13. Nay, it is very certain that the better ſort of heathens were not without ſome comfortable glimpſes and preſages of a happy ſtate after this; and ſeveral of the philoſophers ſpeak great and excellent things concerning it. But yet, notwithſtanding this, the promiſes of eternal life in the Old-teſtament were ſo obſcure, and the diſcourſes of the wiſeſt men among the heathens were ſo

wholly conjectural, that we may truly say, that all the notices they had of this business were but in a manner darkness, in comparison of that exceeding clear light that Christ brought into the world. And therefore it is with reason said by the apostle here, that *he brought life and immortality to light, by the gospel:* because when it was obscure and dark before, he brought it into a clear and perfect light.

Two things I shall do upon this subject:

First of all, display some of that light which Christ by his gospel brought into the world about this matter.

And, *secondly*, give some account of that life and immortality which he thus brought to light: that so when both the evidence of the truth of the thing, and likewise the importance and invaluableness of the blessing it contains in it, lie before us, we may be persuaded most earnestly to set about the obtaining our share in this life and immortality, which is made over to mankind by our Lord Jesus.

I. I begin with the evidence that the gospel gives us concerning this life, or the christian way of demonstrating that there is another world. This is not a slight point, but of the greatest importance imaginable. And however we are taught from our infancy to believe it, yet it will concern us all, if ever we mean to live virtuously and comfortably, and to bear up against all the temptations, and ruffles, and disturbances, and afflictions which the circumstances of our condition in this world will necessarily expose us to: I say, it will concern us above all things to be throughly satisfied of the grounds and reasons upon which we do believe a future state of immortality. For we may

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assure ourselves, when all is done, there is no such security of our virtue, no such preservative against temptations, no such support under any kind of discouragements we meet with, as a firm, rational, well-grounded persuasion of another life.

It is very true, that reason and natural light will furnish a man who is thoughtful and inquisitive with abundance of arguments, from whence he may conclude, that in all probability God designed mankind to be immortal, and that good men shall actually be so. Such arguments, for instance, are the nature of our souls, and their faculties; the strong appetites and desires which are woven into all mens constitutions to live for ever, which the better and wiser any man grows, the more strong he finds them in himself; the fears and presages that wicked men have of a future judgment; the necessity of rewards and punishments, in order both to the making men virtuous, and to the vindicating the justice of God's providence in the distribution of things in this world. All these, I say, are good proofs to a thinking contemplative mind, that there is to be another state after this, wherein good men shall be rewarded, and wicked men punished. But yet, notwithstanding, we see by sufficient experience, that the greatest part of mankind are not much capable of being wrought upon by such abstracted arguments; nay, we see the wisest and most considerate men in the world, after all their enquiries and speculations before our Saviour's time, did but very little towards convincing mankind of the certainty of these things, how firmly soever they might believe them themselves. So that we have need of another sort of arguments, another kind of demonstration, for the clearing and ascertaining these points to us, and rendering

dering them uſeful and operative as to the conduct of our lives. And this is, that we ſay our Lord Jeſus gave us by his goſpel, and particularly by his reſurrection from the dead.

The truth is, life and immortality are things perfectly in God's diſpoſal, and it depends entirely on his pleaſure, whether he will beſtow them upon mankind or no. Now tho', as I ſaid before, we have a great many arguments drawn from the wiſdom, and juſtice, and goodneſs of God, the nature and faculties of our own ſouls, that may render it very credible that God will make good men immortally happy in another ſtate; yet we cannot be ſo certain of this, unleſs it ſhould pleaſe God, by ſome authentic meſſenger, to aſſure us that he would do ſo. One ſuch revelation of God's will, well atteſted, would be worth an hundred ſpeculative metaphyſical arguments for the convincing us about this matter. And ſuch a meſſenger God hath ſent; ſuch a revelation he hath given us, *viz.* by our Lord Jeſus, who came down from God as a publick embaſſador to all the world. And one of the great ends of his coming, was to aſſure all mankind, in the name of God, that there was life and immortality to be had in another world, and not only ſo, but to teach them the certain way how they might all arrive to it. He left thoſe manſions of bliſs to bring us the happy tidings of them, and withal to aſſure us, that they were in his own diſpoſal, and that *whoſoever believed in him, ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life*, John iii. 16. This, indeed, was the main argument of all his diſcourſes, and it is the main argument of the goſpel.

Now that our Saviour affirmed nothing in this matter but what is true, and promiſed no more to his diſciples, than what he was able to make good, and would do

do ſo in due time, we have all the evidence imaginable.

For, 1. He was a perſon who of all the men in the world one would have the leaſt ſuſpicion of, that he was a deceiver, tho' he had given no other confirmation at all of his doctrine, than only the goodneſs and innocence of his own life.

No perſon ever appeared in the world of ſo much goodneſs, of ſuch exemplary virtues and holineſs as he was owner of. But among all his virtues, his ſimplicity, and integrity were ſo conſpicuous, that it was almoſt impoſſible to imagine that he could carry on any other deſign in the world, than only to do good to mankind.

2. There was no juſt exception to be taken at any of his doctrines, they being all pure and heavenly, ſuch as were worthy of God, and agreeable to the principles of mens minds, and tended much to the making the world both better and happier. Which conſideration adds a great degree of credibility to what he delivered in this matter we are ſpeaking of.

3. That he intended not to impoſe upon others as to this point of a future life, but did himſelf verily believe the truth of what he taught, we have this undeniable argument, *viz.* that he freely and willingly laid down his life for the confirmation of it; which he would never have done, had he not firmly believed he ſhould be rewarded in another world. This he himſelf tells us, that *he laid down his life, that he might take it up again*, John x. 17.

4. That he was not miſtaken in what he believ'd himſelf, and what he taught others to believe, is evident from the divine and wonderful works which he wrought throughout the whole courſe of his miniſtry,

for the confirmation of his doctrine; particularly his raising up several persons from death to life. These were the credentials he shew'd for his commission, to preach this doctrine. These were the seal that God set to the truth of what he delivered. It had been utterly inconsistent with the veracity of God, and he had brought an invincible temptation upon mankind to believe a falshood, if he had suffered our Saviour to have wrought these unheard-of miracles, when he professed likewise to work them for the attestation of his doctrine, if this doctrine had not been true. Especially considering likewise, that it was a doctrine, which, as I said before, no man, in point of reason or credibility, had any just exceptions against.

5. But the fullest demonstration of this truth that could possibly be given, was his own resurrection from the grave, and his visible ascension into heaven, in the presence of many spectators, forty days after.

(1.) For, *first* of all, herein is plainly proved the possibility of our resurrection from the dead; and that we mortal creatures who live on the earth, are capable of being carried up into heaven, there to dwell for ever; for that cannot be impossible which hath once been certainly and in fact done.

(2.) And, *secondly*, Christ's resurrection doth not only prove the possibility of ours, but also shew, that we shall certainly rise again, and live for ever in a happy state in heaven, as he doth now. For hereby was demonstrated, beyond all contradiction, the truth of all his doctrines, and therefore consequently of that which he taught concerning the other world. If this had not been true, that we shall live for ever by him, (as he hath promised us) God would have never raised him up to life again, to deceive us a second time, and

in ſo material a thing. But ſeeing *God did not leave his ſoul in hell*, Acts ii. 27, 31. but *exalted him* to a glorious life, even *to ſit at his right hand*, Acts ii. 33. v. 31. in the fulneſs of power and dignity; this is an undeniable argument, that they *who believe in him* ſhall not periſh neither, but *be raiſed again as he was*; John vi. 40. becauſe he who had ſo confidently, before his death, told his diſciples that he would thus riſe again in three days, did with the ſame confidence declare to them, that he would raiſe them alſo, and beſtow upon them everlaſting life. Now the firſt being certainly brought to paſs by the power of God, who alone could do it, there can be no doubt but the other will be made good in due time.

6. But *laſtly*. To all this let me add the teſtimony of the apoſtles and diſciples of Chriſt, who after his death and aſcenſion into heaven, went about the world preaching the truth of their maſter's doctrines, and particularly of this article of the life to come. All of theſe were ſo fully perſuaded of *the glory that was to be revealed*, 1 Pet. v. 1. that they travelled into all countries to publiſh theſe glad tidings, and to bring over all mankind to the belief of Jeſus, and to a hope of eternal life thro' him. And God was pleaſed to work with them, and to confirm the truth of what they preached, by mighty ſigns and wonders: ſo that they themſelves, as well as our Saviour, gave ocular demonſtration of another life, by raiſing the dead, and doing all thoſe great things over again that he had done before them. And that none might ſuſpect this to be an impoſture, they at length moſt of them laid down their lives to atteſt the ſincerity of their faith as to this point.

And now can we require greater or ſtronger evidence for the truth of any thing that doth not fall under

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our ſenſes, than we have given of the life to come? Certainly, whoever among us is an infidel in this point, after ſuch evident demonſtrations as our Saviour and his apoſtles have given of the truth of it, ſhews himſelf to want ſenſe and judgment, as well as goodneſs.

Ay, but the infidel may ſay, all the force of theſe arguments depends upon the truth of the hiſtorical matters of fact that have been inſiſted on. But how ſhall we, who live at ſo great a diſtance of time, know that there ever was ſuch a perſon in the world as Jeſus Chriſt, or that he preached ſuch doctrines, or that he wrought ſuch miracles to confirm them, or that he roſe from the dead, or that he gave ſuch power to his diſciples after him to do thoſe wonderful things? I anſwer, we may know and be aſſured of all theſe things by the ſame evidence, nay much better, than we know that there was ſuch a perſon as Julius Cæſar, and that he obtained ſuch victories, and made ſuch alterations in the government of Rome, and did ſuch other famous acts as are recorded of him. We none of us bore witneſs to theſe tranſactions, but yet we firmly believe them upon the credit of authentic hiſtory, and univerſal uncontrouled tradition, and the permanent effects which followed upon thoſe actions. Upon the ſame ground therefore, and for the ſame reaſon, we cannot refuſe our aſſent to all that the ſacred hiſtory relates of our Saviour, and his apoſtles, it having all the marks of an authentic hiſtory upon it, and being backed with the concurrent teſtimony of other writings in every age ſince that. And, which is more, having at this day ſtanding proofs to give credit to it from the wonderful alterations and effects which followed upon theſe things in the world at the time they were done, and continue viſible in this very age all the world over. So that in truth

truth there can be no exception made againſt the ſcripture-hiſtory, but what may be made againſt any hiſtory in the world: nay, I dare be bold to ſay, we have an hundred times greater and ſtronger evidence for the truth of the hiſtory of our Saviour, as delivered in the New-teſtament, than we have for the truth of any hiſtory in the world; that is, of things or perſons at the ſame diſtance from us.

Bleſſed therefore be God, who hath made us acquainted with the goſpel of his Son, and given us ſuch undeniable evidence for the hiſtorical truth of it. And bleſſed be our Lord Jeſus, who hath in that goſpel brought life and immortality to ſuch a certain and perfect light. That very thing alone, tho' there was nothing elſe to be ſaid for the chriſtian-revelation, would ſufficiently juſtify both the goſpel itſelf, and our Lord Jeſus, the author of it, to all mankind; nay, and effectually recommend his religion, above all others that ever were taught, to all perſons in all nations of the world. This is our glory, and the privilege of our religion, that Chriſt alone hath brought certain tidings of another life. He alone hath aſcertained mankind of that great important propoſition, concerning which, they were in an uncertainty before, *viz.* That *verily there is a reward for the righteous*; *doubtleſs there is a God that judgeth the earth*, Pſ. lviii. 11. Our Lord Jeſus hath not only told us this, but he hath proved it undeniably, and beyond all exception, by raiſing himſelf from the dead, and taking poſſeſſion of the kingdom of heaven by that ſame Spirit of his, which he hath aſſured us ſhall raiſe us up alſo one day, and carry us to that bleſſed place where he now reigns in glory.

O happy tidings! O glorious goſpel! Chriſt Jeſus is come from heaven to demonſtrate that point which

puzzled

puzzled all the wits of the world before. Chriſt hath *brought life and immortality to light by the goſpel.* Chriſt hath *begotten us again to a lively hope, by his reſurrection from the dead,* 1 Pet. i. 3. He hath ſhew'd us that there is a happy glorious ſtate to be attained in heaven after our ſhort labours here. He hath directed us likewiſe moſt plainly and certainly in the way and methods by which we may attain to it. And he himſelf is gone before us to take poſſeſſion of it in our name, and in our behalf, and to prepare manſions for us againſt the time he comes and fetches us thither. O! What ſupport is here to our faith! What encouragement is here to our hopes! What obligation is here to our obedience! What an irreſiſtible argument is here given us to break looſe from our ſins, and our vicious converſation, and from henceforward to devote ourſelves entirely to the ſervice of Jeſus Chriſt our great Lord and maſter, who hath done ſo abundantly for us *above what we could aſk or think!* Eph. iii. 20.

Theſe are the inferences, this is the uſe and application we ought to make to ourſelves of this great point; and which will appear more reaſonable, if we attend a little, in the ſecond place, to the mighty and invaluable bleſſings that are contained in that life and immortality, which Chriſt hath brought to light thro' the goſpel.

II. What is this life and immortality? Certainly it is not barely living for ever without any danger of dying any more; for, in truth, if the immortal life hereafter were not better and happier than the mortal life is, generally ſpeaking, in this world, I know no ſuch reaſon why we ſhould be ſo very deſirous of it, or ſollicitous about it. But God hath made better, infinitely better, proviſions for us. The truth is, the life we here lead, tho' we call it life, may rather, for the moſt part be called

called a continual dying; becauſe the moſt of us feel and experience a great deal more of pain, and uneaſineſs, and reſtleſsneſs, and vexation in it, than we do of true ſolid joy, and pleaſure, and ſatisfaction. But to live truly, is to live happily. This is the ſenſe of all men, and this is the language of ſcripture. We may as juſtly draw a compariſon between the ſtate of infancy and the ſtate of grown men, between ſickneſs and health, between poverty and nakedneſs and the greateſt plenty and affluence of the moſt proſperous condition, as we can between the life we now lead, and the life that good men ſhall live in the world to come.

The life and immortality which Chriſt hath brought to light, and which he hath promiſed to all his faithful diſciples, is a comprehenſion of the greateſt bleſſings that the tongue of man can expreſs, or the heart of man conceive. It is to be tranſlated from a ſtate of dulneſs and anxiety, trouble, affliction, diſappointments, vexations, real grief, ſolid cares, and but imaginary pleaſures, to a ſtate of true happineſs and content, and manly and rational pleaſures; pleaſures not interrupted by ſickneſs or any ſad accidents, not dull'd by being weary of them, or cloy'd with them, not diſturbed either by the inſults of our enemies, or the concernments for our miſerable friends, or our own inequality of temper.

It is to have all the powers and faculties of our ſouls advanced to the higheſt perfection that they are capable of. So that our underſtandings will be perfected by the knowledge of the beſt things, and our wills by the love of them. And we ſhall live in perfect eaſe and peace, in perfect freedom and liberty, in a perfect enjoyment of ourſelves, and the greateſt good we can be partakers of, and that in the moſt perfect ways.

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It is to have our bodies that ſlept in the duſt raiſed again and united to our ſouls; no longer groſs, fleſhly, corruptible bodies, but ſpiritual, heavenly, immortal ones, *faſhioned like unto Chriſt's glorious body, in which he now ſits at God's right hand*, Phil. iii. 21. Rom. viii. 24.

It is to live *in the city of the great King*, the *heavenly Jeruſalem*, (Mat. v. 35. Heb. xii. 22.) a paradiſe of pleaſure, a country of perpetual light and bliſs, where the glory of the Lord fills the place, and where every object that preſents itſelf adds a new beauty to it, and contributes to the increaſe of our delight. It is to ſpend our days in the moſt noble and agreeable employments, in viewing and contemplating all the various works of God, in admiring the wonderful contrivance of his providence in all ages, in adoring his infinite love to the ſons of men, in reflecting upon our own inexpreſſible happineſs that ariſeth from his communications to us, and in ſinging hymns of praiſe, and joy, and triumph to him, and to our Lord Jeſus upon account of all theſe things.

It is to dwell in a place where there are no objects of pity or compaſſion, of anger or hatred, or diſtruſt, every perſon there being as happy as we can wiſh, and all increaſing the happineſs of each other, by the entire love, and kindneſs, and friendſhip that is maintained among them.

Laſtly, It is to be with Jeſus Chriſt, and to behold all his glory, and to live for ever ſeeing and enjoying the great God Almighty, *in whoſe preſence is the fulneſs of joy*, and at *whoſe right hand there are pleaſures for evermore*, Pſ. xvi. 11.—Theſe are the things, in ſhort, which go to the making up that life which Chriſt hath brought to light by his goſpel.

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I have nothing to add more to this deſcription, but what the term of immortality, that is here added to it, doth naturally bring to our thoughts. Let us therefore conſider a little what that word contains in it.

Our life, if we be ſincere chriſtians, ſhall be unſpeakably glorious and happy. But that which adds the crown to all the reſt, is, that it ſhall be an immortal life; a life without danger of dying; a happineſs without danger of loſing: as it will be bleſſedneſs in perfection, ſo it will be bleſſedneſs without end. For this is the everlaſting life that our Saviour hath ſo often promiſed. This is *the inheritance, immortal, undefiled, that fadeth not away, reſerved in the heavens*, as St. Peter ſpeaks, 1 Pet. i. 4. *It is a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken; a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, as St. Paul ſpeaks, 2 Cor. v. 1. Innumerable ages ſhall never put a period to it: but after all the ages we can conceive; nay, tho' we were millions of ages adding numbers to numbers, yet, after all thoſe ages ſo numbered or paſt, good men ſhall be then as glorious, as happy, as full of love, joy, and peace, as they were the firſt moment they entered upon that ſtate; nay, and very probably a great many degrees more happy, more glorious, more wiſe and knowing, more full of love, and joy, and peace, than they were at the beginning. For God is an infinite good; and we can never come to the end of his perfections, becauſe they are infinite, like himſelf. But the longer we live, and we ſhall live for ever, the more we ſhall diſcover of them; and the more we do diſcover, the more we ſhall underſtand; the more we underſtand, the more we ſhall love; the more we underſtand and love, the more

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we ſhall enjoy, and the greater will our happineſs be, and ſo from ages to ages.

Oh! what ſhall we return unto the Lord for all his benefits! Let us love him heartily, ſerve him diligently, devote ourſelves entirely to do the work that he hath ſent us into the world to do. Let us mortify all our carnal, worldly, vicious affections, and at laſt grow out of love with the inſipid, dull gratifications of this ſenſual life, and breathe and pant after that glorious life and immortality that awaits us in another world. Let us think from whom we came, and what we came hither for; and what a noble work we are put upon; and what a glorious iſſue and concluſion we may expect, if we be faithful in it. And let us every day praiſe God, who hath prepared ſo great things for us; and our Lord Jeſus, who hath made known to us the certainty of them, and taught us the way how we may attain them.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

The great folly and danger of delaying repentance.

PSALM cxix. 59, 60.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.
I made haſte and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

THE following week, which we commonly call Paſſion week, being, of all the time of Lent, more eſpecially ſet apart for the purpoſes of religion and devotion, for the examining the ſtate of our ſouls, and exerciſing acts of repentance, that by deeply conſidering what bitter things our Saviour ſuffered for our ſakes, we may be brought to an abhorrence of them, and enter into reſolutions of forſaking them for ever, and ſo devote ourſelves anew to God on Eaſter-day by coming to his table: I ſay, this being the buſineſs of this week, I do not know how I can more uſefully ſpend this half hour, than by endeavouring to excite you all to the imitation of this practice of holy David, which you find

find in the words which I have read unto you. And since there is no difficulty, either in the expression, or in the sense of my text, that needs any explaining, I shall apply myself, without more ado, to the thing I design.

I hope there are few of you here present, but have so far, with the psalmist, *thought upon your ways*, that if you have not already *turned your feet unto God's testimonies* (as he here expresseth it;) if you have not already set yourselves to serve God, and to mind the work of religion, yet you are fully convinced, that some time or other you must do it, if you mean not to perish everlastingly: nay, I doubt not but you heartily purpose and resolve, that if God grant you life and health, you will do it. But now why should you not presently put these purposes in execution? Why should you not with David here *make haste, and without further delay*, apply your minds and study to *the keeping of God's commandments?* Why should you not immediately break loose from the sins which hold you in captivity, and give all diligence, by a strict, sober, virtuous and devout life, *to make your calling and election sure?* (as the apostle expresses it, 2 Pet. i. 10.) that *so*, when you come to die, *an entrance may be ministred unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus?* ver. 11. Let me therefore, this day, call upon you in the name of God, now while he affords you health and strength, let me exhort you to follow David's example in the text, *to make haste, and delay not to keep God's commandments.*

For the more effectual stirring you up to this, give me leave to represent four things to you, which I shall make the heads of my exhortation:

I.

I. First of all; pray let it be consider'd, that the longer you delay this work, still the more difficult it will be to you, and the more labour and pains you will be put to, if ever you prosecute it successfully. This all the world must acknowledge to be true upon these two accounts:

1*st*. The longer you defer this matter, the more unfit you are to undertake it: and 2*dly*, the work still grows greater upon your hands.

1. First of all, the longer you defer this work, the more unfit you render yourselves for the performance of it. For it is here, as in all other arts and habits, that are to be acquired by exercise and application of mind, the longer we put off any design of that nature, the greater unfitness and incapacity we shall find, even in our natural powers, for the compassing of it. One cannot be thought so capable of becoming a learned man, who begins to study at the age of thirty or forty, as he who hath applied his mind to learning from his childhood. The faculties of a man's soul are in a constant flux, and the nature of them is such, that the more early we exercise them about any thing, the more prompt we shall find them in it, and the less trouble we shall have in keeping them to it. It just fares with them as with those that learn music. The younger they are when they begin with that art, the more pliable and nimble their fingers are in touching their instrument. But if they stay till their sinews are knit, they will find them much more stiff and unmanageable. How slight soever the comparison is, yet it truly sets forth the state of the powers of mankind, as to the great work of religion. The longer we delay the employing our faculties that way, the more unfit they will be for it; and especially if we neglect the

thing so long that nature begins to decline, and the heat and briskness of our spirits do abate. In this case it will be a very hard tug for us to make the powers of our souls in any tolerable degree serviceable to us for the work of religion, in case we have not laid out ourselves in that way before. To which we add further, that all those things which do now indispose us, and render us unfit for the service of God, will more and more do so every day, and consequently we are every day less capable of undertaking the work. Whatsoever is a hindrance of that work to-day, will be so to-morrow, and a greater too. For the longer any of us gives way to any evil affection, or any sinful custom, still the stronger it grows upon us, and still more untoward and uncapable we are of receiving contrary impressions. Let no man flatter himself therefore with such thoughts as these; "I am now indisposed for the pursuing virtue, and living religiously; I have other inclinations, which at present carry away my thoughts and designs, and I cannot easily break loose from them. But I hope in God I shall, some time or other, be in a better humour, and then I will be good, then I will serve God." O man, do not deceive thyself with these vain imaginations! If thou be'st not in humour to be good to-day, thou wilt much less be so to-morrow. For thou wilt always have the same inclinations or affections, or others as bad, to hinder thee, and by thy delays to give check to them, they still grow stronger, and thou groweſt weaker. In truth, he that defers the amendment of his manners, tho' it be but for an hour, upon account of his present unfitness, is just in the case of that silly countryman (it is the comparison of an heathen poet) that had a great mind to go over a river, but would stay

ſtay upon the bank till all the water of it was run out. But there, alas, he may for ever ſtay, for the river runs on, and will always continue ſo to do, and poſſibly with a greater flood.

2. But, ſecondly, as all delays in this buſineſs of keeping God's commandments make us more unfit to go about it, ſo do they alſo render the work itſelf much greater, and conſequently more difficult to be performed. It is in this caſe as with a man, who being bound for a certain place, inſtead of going the direct way that leads to it, ſteers his courſe the quite contrary. Now ſuch a man, if ever he comes to his journey's ends, muſt not only travel thro' all thoſe ſtages, which, if he had taken the direct road, muſt have been paſſed by him in order to the arriving where he would be, but he muſt alſo tread over again all thoſe ſteps that he went wrong; ſo that by this means you ſee he hath made his journey much longer than otherwiſe it would have been, and ſo much the longer, by how much the farther he hath gone out of the way. We are all of us in this life upon a journey. The place whither we are bound is the kingdom of heaven. The only way that leads thither, is a life of virtue and holineſs. Oppoſite to this is a courſe of vice and ſin, as being the road that leads to hell and deſtruction. All of us now that purſue this latter courſe, the further we go in it the more we are out of the way, and conſequently the more ſteps have we to make, the more toil and travel to undergo, if ever we come to our journey's end. This then is all the benefit we reap by continuing on in a courſe of ſin: ſome time or other we muſt repent; and the longer we delay it, we have very comfortably heaped up to ourſelves ſo many more and more grievous ſins to

repent of. And who, alas! but he who feels it, can expreſs the inſupportable weight and load that a continued courſe of ſins, with all their aggravating circumſtances, doth lay upon the conſcience of a man when it is once ſeriouſly awakened. We muſt all get virtuous habits ſooner or later. But by putting the work ſtill off, we have done ourſelves this kindneſs, that the effecting of it will coſt us ten times the pains that it would have done, had we begun then when we were firſt convinced that it was our duty to do it. Where then is the wiſdom to defer theſe things; to multiply our work to that degree, that it may perhaps exceed our utmoſt ſtrength to perform it; to lay ſuch burdens upon our ſhoulders, as will poſſibly endanger the breaking of them. Oh, therefore, let us think, whenever we are tempted to commit a ſin, why ſhould I do this action, which, if ever I come to repent of (and I muſt repent of it, if ever I mean to go to heaven) will coſt me ſorrow and trouble more than enough? Whenever God puts good thoughts into our hearts, let us ſay to ourſelves, why ſhould I not now purſue theſe holy motions, and bring them to ſome effect? It is certain, if I do it not at all, I am undone; and if I put the thing off till another time, it will be much more difficult for me to do it. Oh, that we were as wiſe in theſe our great concernments as we are in every little trifling buſineſs of this world; we might ſave ourſelves, God knows how much labour and trouble, which otherwiſe will unavoidably come upon us, or elſe that which is a thouſand times worſe!

II. But to proceed to a ſecond argument, wherewith I would enforce the practice of the text. Eaſineſs and quickneſs of diſpatch is not the only convenience of ſetting preſently upon the work of religion, as neither

neither is the increasing our labour, and the difficulty of the work the only inconvenience of delaying it; but further, let it be considered, that by making haste to keep God's commandments, as David here did, we mightily consult the pleasure and comfort of our following days, as, on the contrary, by delaying it we necessarily prepare fears and disquietude, and unavoidable anxieties of mind all our life after. He who long pursues a vicious course, and returns not till the latter end of his days, must never expect either to live or die in so great peace, or so assured a prospect of being happy in the other world, tho' he be never so diligent and sincere in his religion, as he who begins betimes. All his hopes will be mingled with sad fears of his condition; the sense of the many grievous sins of his life so long persisted in, will still be afflicting his conscience, and he will still be doubtful whether he hath sufficiently repented of them, and whether God hath received him to favour. As he must take greater pains in the working out his salvation than those who engaged early in the business, so must he do it likewise with greater fear and trembling; nay, it may be, he will not be freed from his doubts and perplexities till he finds himself in another state.

This is the unavoidable consequence of putting off the business of religion till our latter days. Why therefore should we not now begin to live so, as when we come to be old, if ever we be so, we shall wish we had lived? Why should we not now in our vigour and strength, make some provisions wherewith to sustain and support ourselves under the burden and infirmities of old age? Why should we, by our present trifling, render the remainder of our life sollicitous and uncomfortable, if not full of disquiet, distraction, and

amazement? O let us now examine what kind of thoughts we ſhall have when we come to die! How ſhall we then wiſh that we had ſerved God, and given up ourſelves to virtue and piety even from our childhood! How ſhall we regret every year, and every day that we have laviſhed away in pleaſure, or in idleneſs, or in worldlineſs, or any other way, to the neglect of our ſpiritual concernments! The more haſte we make to be good, the more ſhall we then thank God and ourſelves for it. But all delay, according to the degree of it, will increaſe our trouble, and render our everlaſting condition more doubtful and unſecure, at leaſt to our own apprehenſion.

III. Let it be further conſidered, that by *making haſte, without delay, to keep God's commandments*, we do not only more conſult the comfort and happineſs of our following days, but alſo our happineſs in the future ſtate, which will be ſo much the greater, by how much the earlier we begun to be religious. This is my third argument, wherewith I would preſs this point upon you.—It is a known truth, that all who are happy in the other world are not equally happy; but there are ſeveral degrees of glory there, as *one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory*, which is the apoſtle's compariſon, 1 *Cor.* xv. 41. The righteous judge of the world proportioneth every man's reward to his work; and therefore they who have more retained their innocence in this life, they who have ſpent more of their time in the ſervice of God, and have been guilty of fewer crimes and interruptions in their duty, and have made greater progreſs and advancement in all chriſtian graces and virtues, theſe will receive a far more glorious crown in the day of judgment, than they who have miſemployed the greateſt part of their time and their talents in a courſe

courſe of vanity and ſin, and do at laſt return to wiſdom and ſobriety. It is not to be imagined, according to the common rules of equity, (tho' we had no divine revelation for it, as yet we have very clearly) that ſuch as have ſerved their luſts, and done the drudgery of ſatan for the greateſt part of their lives, and at laſt, when their natural heat and vigour is ſpent, do change their maſter, and liſt themſelves into the ſervice of our Lord Jeſus; (tho' we ſuppoſe they are accepted as being ſincere in their repentance, tho' it was late begun) yet, I ſay, it cannot be imagin'd but they will fall extremely ſhort, as to the degree of their happineſs, of thoſe who devoted the beſt of their ſtrength and of their time to God.

This conſideration, tho' it doth concern all men whatſoever, yet doth it in an eſpecial manner concern young perſons, ſuch as have a great deal of time before them, as we commonly ſpeak. O how happy would it be for ſuch, if they would ſeriouſly lay this matter to heart, before either a habit of careleſsneſs, or ſenſuality, or worldly-mindedneſs hath got poſſeſſion of them! Such perſons have yet their fortunes to make, both for this world and the other. What ſucceſs they may meet with as to their worldly concernments, be they never ſo diligent in their buſineſs, I dare not anſwer for: for in this world, as Solomon has told us, *the race is not always to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong, nor bread to the wiſe, nor riches to the man of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of ſkill, but time and chance happeneth to them all*, Eccleſ. ix. 11. But then, as to their concernments in the other world, that is not ſo doubtful a buſineſs; for I dare poſitively pronounce to them, that they have now ſuch opportunities put into their hands, that if they do make uſe of

them, and improve them as they ſhould, they cannot fail of laying up to themſelves a great ſtock both of virtue here, and of glory and happineſs hereafter: far greater than that of thoſe who ſpend the firſt part of their life looſely and carelesſly, and afterward begin to bethink themſelves, and entertain better counſels, all along ſuppoſing that they continue equally diligent. However they may fail of their worldly aims and deſigns, yet they can never be diſappointed as to this. We ſay, and we ſay truly, happy is the man who at any time of his life doth ſeriouſly apply himſelf to virtue and goodneſs; yet it muſt be owned by all, that much more happy is he who hath walked in the paths of virtue from his childhood, and hath never made any great wounds in his conſcience, by going aſtray from his heavenly Father in any groſs inſtances, but hath all along purſued the ways of God with care and induſtry from the time that he was firſt made acquainted with them. Oh, what a vaſt treaſure of glory and reward may ſuch a one by his diligence purchaſe to himſelf above other men! And thus much of my third argument. But if all this will not prevail upon us to enter into a conſideration of our ways, and without further delay apply ourſelves to the keeping God's commandments;

IV. Let me, in the laſt place, beg of you to conſider the infinite hazard we all run by neglecting this work, upon account of the great uncertainty of our preſent lives. We have but ſuch a determinate term allotted to us for the doing our great work in. And this term, at the largeſt computation, can extend no farther than the time of our lives. And yet is not this time of our lives infinitely uncertain? Are any of us ſure we ſhall be alive a month hence? Have we not almoſt every

day

day inſtances preſented to us of thoſe who are ſnatched away by a ſudden and unexpected death? Have we not heard of a great many, who, in all appearance, were as ſound and healthful as ourſelves, and dreamed no more of dying than we do now, who have yet almoſt in the twinkling of an eye been carried off by an apoplexy, or a fever, or a ſtroke of an enemy, or the aſſault of robbers, or ſome other unavoidable caſualty? There are a thouſand ways to let out life in a moment; and it is not in the power of the moſt ſagacious prudence either to foreſee or to prevent one of them. Who then, that is in his wits, will, upon the preſumption that he ſhall live many years, nay, that he live many weeks longer, put off a buſineſs of ſuch vaſt concernment to him, that if it be not timely taken care of, he is utterly undone to all purpoſes for evermore?

Give me leave to dwell a little upon this argument, and to preſs it upon you as warmly as I can, and that ſhall ſerve for my application at this time.

Since, my brethren, upon this ſhort, this uncertain life, depends our eternal fortune in the next world, how infinitely doth it concern us to trifle no longer! Methinks the very thoughts of this, that upon this ſingle point (for life is but a point, a moment, in compariſon of eternity) depends our life for evermore, ſhould awaken the moſt ſtupid inſenſible man out of his deep ſleep of careleſsneſs and ſenſuality, to a quick and pungent ſenſe of his everlaſting intereſts. Muſt we be eternally ſaved or damned by what we do here, and is it not high time for us to begin to look after our own condition? Shall we let day after day, year after year, paſs over our heads, and we all the time think of nothing but the preſent? deſign nothing but juſt how to live eaſily here? nay, perhaps, only how to ſpend

that ſingle day which lies ſo upon our hands, that we are at a loſs for the employing of it? Why, fools that we are, our ſand runs on; it runs apace all this while that we are a doing nothing; and we know not how ſoon the glaſs will be out. And when it is, good God! what follows? Why, eternity; a bottomleſs gulph of infinity; that which will never have an end; that which is never capable of a change or alteration. Can we think of this and ſit ſtill? Is our day, that fatal, dreadful day of death, ſo certainly, nay perhaps ſo ſuddenly, a coming, and can we live unconcerned? Can we *fold our arms*, and ſay, *with the ſluggard, yet a little ſleep, yet a little ſlumber?* Prov. vi. 10. Let us yet a little enjoy ourſelves, and caſt care behind us? Why, methinks, the ſound of every paſſing-bell ſhould alarm us. We ſhould not be able to hear that any of our acquaintance, or any of the neighbourhood, is carried off, but it ſhould ſtrike us to the heart, and put us upon reflecting, Lord, in what a ſad condition ſhould I be, if this had been now my caſe! Whatever company we were in, or whatever buſineſs we had upon our hands, whatever deſigns of worldly profit or advantage we were a purſuing, or whatever pleaſures or divertiſements we had prepared to ourſelves, yet, methinks, it ſhould be ſufficient to blaſt all theſe, and to ſpoil all the content and ſatisfaction we could expect from them, to have but ſuch a thought as this to come into our minds; "Ay, this would be very well, if it would laſt always. But, alas! I muſt be gone, miſerable man that I am, I muſt be gone, and leave all theſe things behind me: I muſt be gone to my long home, where I muſt live for ever, either a perfectly happy man, or the moſt wretched creature in the world. And God knows which of them will be my lot; I may

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prove the latter; I may experience what it is to live with everlasting burnings. But as to the former, the state of happiness, that I have made no provision for, but have all my work yet to do." Oh, how killing and unsupportable is such a thought as this! One would think that the reflection upon it would keep us from giving any rest to our heads, or any slumber to our eyes, till we had made some steps towards the securing our everlasting concernments.

But, alas! we are not much given to think upon these things; we are a trifling sort of creatures, that love to put the evil day far from us, and to enjoy the present. Let us live to day; let who will take care of what comes after. Let us be rich; let us appear somebody in the world; let us live at ease; let us enjoy ourselves and our friends, and let damnation, if it will, come at the conclusion.

O foolish and insensible creatures that we are! Is it thus that we employ our noble faculties of reason and understanding? Is this the use we make of all God's kindness and long-suffering, of all those means he affords us for our good? Yes, this. No better than this, to our shame be it spoken. God, out of pure kindness, gave us our beings, and sent us hither for no other end, but that after a short and tolerably comfortable life here, we should live with him in eternal blessedness hereafter. Accordingly he has not been wanting in any thing that might minister to these purposes. He doth afford us health, and strength, and reason, and conscience, and memory, for the carrying on this great work. He orders all the creatures of the visible world to be at our service while we are a doing it. The sun fails not to give us light. The earth fails not to yield her fruits of increase. The beasts, the fowls, the fishes, the whole creation doth daily minister

miniſter to our ſupports, and conveniencies, and delights: nay, the inhabitants of the inviſible world think not themſelves too good to attend upon mankind, for the preſerving them from their ſpiritual enemies, and advancing this their great work of eternity. But, which is more than all this, God ſends his own Son to live and to die for us. And the goſpel of his everlaſting ſalvation he hath taken care ſhall be daily ſounding in our ears. We are told of our faults, and we are directed into the right way, and we are called upon continually to purſue it. The Holy Spirit of God does daily ſollicit and importune our ſouls, as well by his holy word and the outward adminiſtrations of the church, as by his inward motions to remember what we were born to; and what God expects from us, and at leaſt to yield up our hearts and lives to his divine conduct, and to render ourſelves happy, by an entire cloſing with God Almighty's moſt gracious propoſals: and laſtly, to ſay no more, the providence of God doth continually watch over us, and takes occaſion, by the actions, and events, and contingencies that happen to us almoſt every day of our lives, to put us in mind of our great concernments; to check us in our fooliſh career of vice and ſin; to wean our affections from their unreaſonable fondneſſes to this world, and the vanities of it; and to bring us to a true ſenſe of what we came hither for. All this God hath done, and doth daily for us. How now do we improve theſe bleſſed opportunities? What returns do we make to God for ſuch unſpeakable mercies? Why, in truth, it is a very ſad and melancholy thing to give an anſwer to this queſtion. Several there are among us, God be praiſed, that do make a right uſe of theſe bleſſings, and do ſeriouſly and carefully purſue an holy life, in order to their eternal happineſs

pineſs hereafter. And bleſſed of God be all ſuch, and certainly for ever bleſſed ſhall they be of the Lord. But it muſt be confeſſed, that theſe are but few in compariſon of the bulk of mankind. The generality of men, I doubt, are of another mind, and take other meaſures.

Give me leave to ſpeak freely about this matter. Some there are among us, who laugh and ſcoff at all thoſe things we are talking of; and look upon all this buſineſs of another world as a made ſtory, for the frightning ſilly and timorous people. Very wiſe, and grave, and learned men are they in the mean time. But I defy any of them to be able to arrive at this depth of thinking or talking, till by a courſe of vice and ſenſuality they have quite defaced the natural principles of their minds, and have ſcarce a ſpark of man remaining in them. Others there are, who make it their buſineſs to keep their heads continually hot with drink and company, that their conſciences may not be made uneaſy, nor their minds diſturbed with ſuch troubleſome reflections, as they certainly would be, if they were but ſuffered to cool, and had the leiſure calmly to reflect on theſe things. Others, partly thro' cuſtom, and partly thro' their worldly inclinations, have ſo fetter'd and intangled themſelves with a crowd of buſineſs and ſecular affairs, that that is always running in their heads, nor have they time to attend to any other matters. And others among us are altogether immerſed in brutiſh and ſenſual luſts, and have no more ſenſe of any thing that is not fleſh and blood, than goats or ſatyrs. Laſtly, others are rather ſilly and unthinking, than groſly wicked; they do believe theſe things, and often with reflection and concernedneſs enough call them to mind. But, they do not know how, they are fatally overborne with

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ſomething or other from ſeriouſly and induſtriouſly purſuing the eternal welfare of their ſouls, tho' they are apprehenſive enough how much it doth concern them. Their comfort is, they mean well, and their lives are not very bad; and they hope, ſome time or other, they ſhall have the grace to apply themſelves cloſely to the buſineſs of a religious, and ſerious, and devout life; tho' at the preſent they cannot but own they lead a very careleſs one, having no ſenſe of God or religion upon their minds, as to their common converſation.

This laſt ſort of people, now as they are (we thank God) the moſt in number, ſo are they the moſt hopeful of any of thoſe I have now named; and therefore to theſe chiefly do I at this time apply my diſcourſe.

You believe there is a God and a devil. You believe that there is a heaven for pious and virtuous perſons to be rewarded in, and a hell, in which all vicious and wicked men ſhall be everlaſtingly puniſh'd. And you are ſenſible likewiſe, that, according to the preparations you make in this life, ſo ſhall you have your portion in the one, or in the other: nay, ſo far are you ſenſible of this, that you ſeriouſly think, ſome time or other, of calling yourſelves to account for your life paſt, and reforming whatever is amiſs in you, and making it your buſineſs to live more ſtrictly, and virtuouſly, and religiouſly, than ever you have yet done. Why all this is very well. But why, in God's name, do you defer it? Why do not you go about it preſently? Can you conſider, that upon your behaviour in this life depends your whole eternity; and can you after this think it reaſonable to neglect a day longer the ſecuring that infinite concernment? What is it you do expect? Do you hope for clearer revelations of God's will in this matter? or more powerful aſſiſtances from his ſpirit? Alas!

Alas! it is in vain. God hath made his laſt diſcoveries by Jeſus Chriſt; nor are you ever to think of other motives, or other aſſiſtances, than what are made to you in the goſpel, and which you have had already ſome experience of. And thoſe too may fail you, if you do ſtill continue to neglect or abuſe them when God offers them to you. Do not deceive yourſelves, God hath done all that is neceſſary; nay, all that is fit and convenient for his part to do towards your ſalvation. And if you will ſtill harden your hearts, and ſtand out againſt his gracious tenders of mercy, your ruin will lie wholly at your own doors.

But perhaps you may think you ſhall be fitter for that ſerious work ſome time hence, when you have diſpatched ſome other affairs, that your hearts and hands are now full of. But this I have already ſhewn you is a vain imagination, it being certain, as I ſaid, that every day of your life that you defer this buſineſs, it will ſtill grow more difficult, and you will be leſs able to undertake it. But after all, you do not conſider that all this while you are demurring and putting off this work, I ſay, you do not conſider what little command you have of your own life. You are now in health, and you think that by the courſe of nature you may live many years. But what if you ſhould not? What if you ſhould die a year hence, or a month hence? (as it is odds but that ſeveral that now hear me will be gone to their long home before another annual revolution be come about.) Nay, what if, while you are ſaying to yourſelves, with the rich man in the goſpel, *Soul, take thine eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry*, you ſhould hear a voice, ſaying, *O fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be taken from thee?* Luke xii. 19, 20. O, in what a miſerable condition would you then be! It is in

vain then to begin your work, for that is the time it ſhould be concluded. It is in vain to beg for longer time, for the decree of heaven is paſſed upon you: you muſt go, though you be never ſo unwilling. If indeed you had any art, any ſkill, any power to prevail with death, or to oblige thoſe, in whoſe hands your life is, to ſpare you, and give you longer time, you would ſay ſomething. But this you cannot do, nay, you know you cannot do it. You come hither upon the ſame terms and conditions that all other people do. And you know that every man's life is at the mercy of a thouſand accidents every day.

Oh, Lord, then what intolerable nonſenſe is it, to put off the greateſt buſineſs we have to do in the world, that buſineſs, which, if it be not taken care of, we are undone for evermore, in hopes of the continuance of a life, which we are not certain, no, nor is it poſſible we ſhould have any certainty, that it will continue for a year; no, nor for a month; no, nor for a day. God Almighty give us grace ſo to conſider theſe things, that we may all of us immediately *think of our ways, and turn our feet unto his teſtimonies*, that *we may make haſte, and without further delay, enter upon the keeping his commandments.*

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SERMON IX.

Obligations to godlineſs and virtue, from the conſideration of the nature of the chriſtian calling, in general and in particular.

EPHES. iv. 1.

I therefore the priſoner of the Lord, beſeech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

THAT is to ſay, you are, by the great mercy of God, called to be chriſtians. I beſeech you, take care that your converſation be ſuch as becomes that calling. God hath brought you out of the darkneſs of heatheniſm into the light of the goſpel: it is fit therefore you ſhould walk as children of the light. You have taken upon yourſelves the profeſſion of a holy and pure religion, which makes over to its followers ineſtimable privileges and benefits. This is your calling, your vocation. Oh! let your lives bear ſome ſuitableneſs thereto. Let the frame of your minds, and the tenor of your

your actions, hold ſome proportion with the dignity and mighty advantages of this high calling in Chriſt Jeſus.

This is that which the apoſtle begs of the Epheſians here, and of all other chriſtians. And no man living can ſay that he aſks any thing but what is infinitely reaſonable. It is the fundamental law of univerſal nature, that every thing ſhould act according to its kind; and it is the fundamental law of the reaſonable nature in particular, that we ſhould obſerve the reſpects and relations that things have to things, and the congruities and incongruities that ariſe from hence, and direct all our actions accordingly. And whoſoever in any caſe acts contradictorily to the perſon he ſuſtains, or unſuitably to the profeſſion he makes, doth act abſurdly and ridiculouſly; for he deſtroys the propriety, and confounds the relations of things. In ſhort, for a man to be a chriſtian in vocation, to own Chriſt for his Lord, and the goſpel for his rule; and yet to live like a heathen, or an atheiſt, or a worldling, or an epicure, is ſuch a piece of unreaſonableneſs, as no apology can be made for.

But what is it that the apoſtle would have us do? What ſort of converſation is it that he requires of us, when he bids us to *walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called?* I anſwer, you yourſelves, and every man in the world, that underſtands what it is to be a chriſtian, is a competent judge of that. Do but inquire of yourſelves what the nature of your vocation is, what you profeſs in it, and what benefits you expect from it, and you will need no inſtructor, as to the ſort of life and converſation that is worthy of it; nor indeed will you need any further motives or arguments to oblige you to put it in practice. To aſſiſt you therefore

fore in making theſe inquiries ſhall be my work at this time. And here my method ſhall be, firſt, to conſider our vocation in general, and to ſhew what the obligations of that are.

2dly, To take notice of ſome particulars in our vocation, which will ſtill add a further force to the general conſideration.

I. I begin with our vocation in general. And there the query that I would propoſe to you to put to yourſelves, is this: What ſort of life doth ſo clear, ſo full, ſo excellent a diſcovery of God's will for the ſalvation of mankind, as we have by Jeſus Chriſt, in compariſon of what the world had before; what ſort of life, I ſay, doth it require of all thoſe who have the knowledge of it? What kind of life ſhould that man lead, who is called from darkneſs to light; from ignorance of God, and of the way of recommending ourſelves to him, to a plain revelation of his will; from the bondage of death, to a certain hope of a glorious immortality; from a profane and impious worſhip, to a holy, pure and reaſonable ſervice? Will not nature teach ſuch a one, that in proportion to thoſe advantages he hath above others, he ought alſo to be more exact and regular in his life, more careful to approve himſelf to God, more ſtudious of his will, and more zealous and induſtrious in his ſervice, than other men, who have not thoſe means or thoſe privileges? Yet this, my brethren, is our vocation, and therefore judge ye how unworthy we are of it, if it do not produce thoſe effects in us. Nay, judge ye whether this our vocation will not turn to our unſpeakable miſery and puniſhment, if it be not attended with thoſe fruits. *If I had not*, ſays our Saviour, *come and ſpoken to them, they had not had ſin; but now they have no cloak for their ſin*, John xv. 22.

There

There was ſomething to be ſaid for men, who lived in the darkneſs of gentiliſm, who had no other guide but the mere light of nature, and that too horribly darkned and obſcured thro' that univerſal degeneracy and corruption of manners that obtained all the world over. *The times of this ignorance God* might be ſuppoſed *to wink at*, Acts xvii. 30. Or if he would puniſh thoſe men for their ſins, yet it was to be hoped that he would do it lightly; and *becauſe they knew not their maſter's will*, and therefore *did it not*, *they ſhould be beaten* only *with few ſtripes*, as our Lord expreſſes it, Luke xii. 48. Nay, there was ſomething alſo to be ſaid in excuſe for thoſe who lived a worldly, ſenſual, vicious life, under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, where, tho' they were in covenant with God, and had his laws and his promiſes, yet both thoſe laws and promiſes being in the letter and outward appearance of an earthly temporal nature, and in a manner relating only to the things of this life, it might be preſumed a hard matter for them to raiſe up their minds above this world, they ſeeming to want both light and encouragement to put them upon a vigorous purſuit of holineſs here, or happineſs hereafter. Upon this conſideration, I ſay, there was ſomething to be ſaid in apology for the Jews, tho' they lived not ſo purely and ſo virtuouſly as they ought to do. But for us who are under the chriſtian diſpenſation, who have been inſtructed in the whole will of God, and that by no leſs a maſter than his own Son; who have the ſtrongeſt demonſtrations in the world given us of another life after this, and the moſt explicit promiſes that we ſhall be partakers of it, if we be obedient to God's laws, and have likewiſe the plaineſt and fulleſt rules to direct us in that obedience; ſo that none of us, how ignorant or how ſhallow ſoever we be in other reſ-

pects,

ects, yet, if we be honeſt, can poſſibly miſs of our ay to heaven: and laſtly, who have all this made out o us with ſo much clearneſs of evidence, as will leave o place for doubting in any reaſonable indifferent mind. ſay, what can be ſaid for us, if after having theſe great pportunities put into our hands of *entring into God's* verlaſting *reſt*, any *of us fall ſhort* thro' diſobedience r *unbelief*, Heb. iii.

Oh, happy we chriſtians above all men in the world! having theſe clear diſcoveries of God's will, and heſe ineſtimable advantages that flow therefrom, we o embrace and entertain them, and improve and make hat uſe of them we ought to do, by leading a holy, ure, and heavenly life. But certainly we are the moſt nexcuſable wretched people under heaven, if we do ot: much *better had it been for us*, as St. Peter ſpeaks, 2 Ep. ii. 21. *never to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after we have known it, to depart from the holy commandment delivered to us.*

Oh, my brethren, to conſider in how much darkneſs all the reſt of the world lies, and what a glorious light ſhines forth to us chriſtians; to conſider how little hopes, or how little means they have of everlaſting ſalvation, and how richly, how abundantly God hath furniſhed us with both; ſo that nothing is wanting to us, in order to our being everlaſtingly happy, but only our own choice and concurrence: how ought this conſideration to effect us! What infinite thanks do we owe to our gracious God for theſe unſpeakable mercies! And how can we expreſs theſe thanks otherwiſe than by the returns of a moſt hearty love, and devoting ourſelves entirely to his ſervice all the days of our life!

It is true, there are very few, if there be any, nations in the world ſo barbarous, as not to be of ſome religion

ligion or other. They do believe a God, and his providence and government of the world: nay, the generality of Pagan countries at this day do expect another life after this, wherein good men ſhall be rewarded, and wicked men puniſhed. But then theſe general fundamental truths are ſo buried in an heap of errors, are ſo defaced, and the force of them ſo much weakned thro' a multitude of falſe and miſchievous principles that are mingled with them, that really the condition of thoſe countries is very deplorable. What ſhameful falſe notions have they of God and his perfections! What horrible idolatry and ſuperſtition is to be ſeen in all their worſhip! How ſlenderly grounded is their belief of another life, and what odd kind of fancies have they about it! What a world of foppery and nonſenſe is there in all their divinity! How much are they in the dark touching the will of God and the way of recommending themſelves to his favour! and how various and fanciful, nay, how ridiculous, and often impious, are the methods they have pitched on for this purpoſe! Not to ſpeak of the horrible ſlavery they are in to the devil, who exerciſes a moſt cruel tyranny over them in abundance of inſtances.

But, bleſſed be the God of heaven, we chriſtians have none of theſe difficulties, none of theſe inconveniencies to ſtruggle with. We have a holy and a pure religion taught us by God himſelf; a religion, that in all the parts of it is worthy of God, and fitted to all the neceſſities of man. We have a religion that teaches us to ſerve God in a way ſuitable to his nature and to our own, that impoſeth nothing upon us but what is good and excellent in itſelf, and tending to the perfection of our natures, and to the peace and happineſs both of private perſons, and publick ſocieties. We have a

religion

religion that leaves us not to uncertain gueſſes and conjectures about a future ſalvation, but has given us God's expreſs word and promiſe for it, ſealed by the blood of his own Son, and confirmed by his reſurrection from the dead, and taking poſſeſſion of the kingdom of heaven in our behalf. We have a religion that leaves us not to grope in the dark how to get to that glorious place where our Saviour is, but has deſcribed to us all the way that leads to it ſo plainly, and withal given us ſuch notices of all the by-paths that may miſlead us, that, if we be not extreamly wanting to ourſelves, we cannot fail of arriving thither. We have a religion that recommends itſelf to our reaſon and underſtanding, in which there is nothing trifling, nothing abſurd, and which the more any man acquaints himſelf with, the more ſatisfaction he will have concerning it. Laſtly, we have a religion, for which there is all the proof, all the evidence, that either heaven or earth can give for a thing of this nature. It is a religion predicted by the prophets; own'd ſeveral times by God's own voice from heaven; confeſſed by the devils; eſtabliſhed by an innumerable multitude of ſigns and wonders, and miracles for a hundred years together; atteſted by the glorious reſurrection of our Saviour from the grave, and his viſible aſcenſion into heaven; confirmed by the lives and wonderful actions of a continued ſucceſſion of wiſe, and good, and divine men, who have profeſſed it; manifeſted by the overthrow of the devil's kingdom in all places where it got footing; and aſſerted by the ſufferings of ten thouſand glorious martyrs and confeſſors, who have from age to age refuſed no torments, no cruelties of death, to ſhew how firmly they believed it.

This

This now being the caſe of the chriſtian religion; and the profeſſion of this religion being the happy and glorious vocation to which we are called by our Lord Jeſus, Oh, what obligations do there lie upon us above all the reſt of mankind, to be ſerious in the ſervice of God; to be pure and unblameable in our lives, and to abound in *all the fruits of righteouſneſs which are by Chriſt Jeſus to the praiſe and glory of his name!* Phil. i. 11. And ſo to ſhew forth the natural genuine fruits of ſo holy, ſo excellent a religion! Oh, what *manner of perſons ought we to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs!* 2 Pet. iii. 11. Can there be any among us who *names the name of Chriſt, and not depart from all iniquity?* 2 Tim. ii. 19. Is it poſſible, that where ſo glorious a light ſhines forth, there ſhould be any ſuch men as atheiſts, ſadducees, or unbelievers? Any ſuch thing as profaneneſs, adultery, whoredom, drunkenneſs, envy, malice, covetouſneſs, or the like? Why theſe are the proper fruits of the heathen ſtate, out of which Chriſt hath delivered us: and one would think that none of them ſhould be found among chriſtians. Theſe are the works of darkneſs, and fit only for ſuch people where the light of the goſpel never appeared, and who are the vaſſals of ſatan, and *led captive by him at his will*, and pleaſure, 2 Tim. ii. 26; but no way becoming the children of light, who make profeſſion to believe in our Lord Jeſus. But why do I talk of chriſtians? The heathens themſelves (as wretched as their circumſtances were) were many of them aſhamed of ſuch practices, and therefore they ſhall be our judges. Many of them, notwithſtanding the great darkneſs and ignorance they lay under, notwithſtanding the multitude of ill examples they had before them, yet have ſo preſerved the dignity of human nature, as to keep themſelves

ſelves pure from thoſe crimes and immoralities which I have now been ſpeaking of. Nay, many of them, without any other power than thoſe of nature, have, thro' the bleſſing of God upon their endeavours, not only learned to live free from all taint of open vice, but have been indeed patterns of virtue; have been exemplary for juſtice and temperance, for fortitude and patience, for fidelity and truth, for munificence and liberality, for moderation and contempt of the world, for a publick ſpirit and a zealous love for their country. Several ſuch inſtances are to be met with, not only among the antient Greeks and Romans, but among the modern Indians and Japoneſe, and other barbarous nations. Oh, how much more in this are they to be commended and applauded, than even ſome of us who paſs among the better ſort of chriſtians! (as chriſtianity now a-days goes:) But what an eternal ſhame and reproach is this to the generality of us, who in good earneſt are not to be named with many of the pagans for true virtue and religion! Is this *to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we are called?* Is this *to adorn the doctrine of God in all things?* Tit. ii. 10. They, with all their ignorance, and all their errors in matters of religion, lived honeſtly, had a ſenſe of God and virtue. A great many of us, with all our light, all our encouragements, all our aſſiſtances, live like brutes, like men without God; ſlaves to a thouſand follies, to a thouſand luſts and paſſions: nay, in truth, I am afraid that even a great many ſerious men among us cannot think of ſeveral of the heathens, ſuch men as Socrates and Ariſtides, ſuch men as Cato, and Tully, and Seneca, and a great many more ſuch that might be named, without bluſhing for ſhame that we come ſo very far ſhort of them, having a

thouſand times more knowledge in the things of God, and more means, and encouragements, and advantages for the improving ourſelves in all ſorts of virtue, than they had. But let us not deceive ourſelves, *God is no reſpecter of perſons*, Acts x. 34. I heartily wiſh that thoſe poor heathens, of whom we generally have ſo mean an opinion, may not one day riſe in judgment againſt us chriſtians, and condemn us; (not that I wiſh them ill, but I wiſh we were better) and that it do not come to paſs what our Saviour once told the Jews, that *many ſhall come from the eaſt, and from the weſt, and from the north, and from the ſouth, and ſhall ſit down with Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; when many of us, who are the children of the kingdom, ſhall be caſt out into outer darkneſs, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnaſhing of teeth*, Matt. viii. 11, 12.

But it is time to leave this head, and to proceed. I have hitherto conſidered our vocation in general, as it is the taking upon ourſelves the profeſſion of the chriſtian religion. And by this general account I have given you of it, you may eaſily perceive what great obligations are laid upon us chriſtians to lead holy, pure, and virtuous lives above all the men in the world. And how unworthy we are of our vocation, and how contradictorily we act to it if we do not. But you will ſtill be more convinced of this, if you will enter into a conſideration of the particular things either done for you, or promiſed by you, in the taking this calling upon yourſelves.

Theſe therefore I ſhall now briefly touch upon, in order to the further ſhewing what kind of walking is worthy of our vocation, and what obligations we have upon

upon us ſo to walk. And this is the ſecond part of my diſcourſe.

II. Now the conſiderations I would propoſe are theſe following, which I ſhall put, as I did the former, in the nature of queries. And I beg of you that you will anſwer them to your own conſciences.

1. I beſeech you conſider what kind of life ſhould that man lead, who, thro' the infinite kindneſs of the Son of God, is reſcued from the jaws of hell and death; is redeemed from the wrath of God, and the inſupportable vengeance of eternal fire, which his ſins did juſtly call for; and this at no leſs a price than that Son of God laying down his life, and ſhedding his moſt precious blood, that he might thereby make a propitiation for us. This now is the caſe of every chriſtian. And doth it become ſuch a one, becauſe he hath been pardoned ſo many and ſo high provocations; I ſay, doth it become him to go on in his ſins? Doth it become him to take advantage from the inexpreſſible mercies he hath found, to multiply his affronts againſt heaven, that ſo, *becauſe grace hath abounded, ſin may abound much more?* Rom. v. and vi. Oh, unnatural, wicked, blaſphemous inference! Sure every man, who is ſenſible what it coſt the Son of God to redeem ſinners, might have other thoughts; and muſt rather argue thus, that ſince our dear Lord Jeſus hath, at ſo vaſt a price, obtained the pardon of our ſins, and, by his calling us to his ſervice, hath given us a title to that pardon, we ſhould, above all things in the world, have a care of new ſcores, have a care of again offending our God, and provoking his diſpleaſure againſt us. It is an unnatural thing to reaſon otherwiſe; and whoever has any ſenſe of ingenuity, cannot but look upon this aſtoniſhing kindneſs of

our Lord, in ranſoming us with his blood, as the greateſt obligation that could poſſibly be laid upon us, to renounce, to abandon, to hate with a perfect hatred, all ſin and wickedneſs in all the kinds, and even in all the degrees of it.

2. Again, pray aſk yourſelves what kind of converſation becomes that man who hath ſolemnly dedicated himſelf to God; who hath publickly, and in the face of the world, profeſſed to renounce the devil and all his works, the vanities of the world, and the luſts of the fleſh, and devoted himſelf, both body and ſoul, as a living holy ſacrifice for ever to his creator and redeemer. And yet this is the caſe of all of us, who are made partakers of the chriſtian vocation. This engagement we have all taken upon ourſelves at our firſt entring into Chriſt's religion, and moſt of us, to be ſure, if not all of us, have ſeveral times renewed it. So that being thus ſolemnly conſecrated to God and Chriſt, we are none of us at our own diſpoſal, but have entirely given up ourſelves to God to be diſpoſed of by him. Oh, let us think of this, and then judge what kind of converſation will be worthy of our calling! Whether, being in theſe circumſtances, it will be poſſible for us, without the moſt horrid perjury and ſacrilege, to allow ourſelves in any known open courſe of wilful ſin; nay, whether being thus devoted to God, we are not very falſe to our engagements, if we do not make his ſervice, and the promoting his intereſts, the great buſineſs and deſign of our lives?

3. Be pleaſed to aſk yourſelves further, what kind of life ſhould that man lead, who is called into the neareſt relation to God Almighty; who, from a child of wrath and ſlave of ſatan, is made the *ſon of God*, the brother of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and *a joint heir with*

with him of the inheritance of God, Rom. viii. 17. Why certainly, upon the very firſt naming of this, it ſhould come into every body's thoughts, that a perſon who is thus highly dignified, ought to have a great, and a noble, and a generous ſoul, ſuitable to that quality to which he is advanced, and becoming that illuſtrious quality into which he is adopted. It ſhould come into every body's thoughts, that ſuch a perſon ſhould think himſelf concerned above all things, to behave himſelf in all the circumſtances of his life bravely and worthily, and ſhould take a world of care that he did not by any baſe, mean carriage of his, put a diſparagement upon that alliance that he is honoured with. And yet this is the calling to which we chriſtians are called. Theſe are the privileges that, by undertaking Chriſt's religion, we are promoted to. We are the *children of the moſt High*, and the *Son of God is not aſhamed to call us brethren*. We are made *kings*, and *prieſts unto God* our Father. We are *his friends*, *his favourites*, *his choſen ones*; in a word, *the portion*, *the poſſeſſion*, *the treaſure of God* in this world, Luk. vi. 35. Heb. ii. 11. Rev. v. 10. John xv. 14, 15. Eph. i. 14. 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9. All theſe titles are beſtowed upon chriſtians by the inſpired writers. Oh therefore, let us conſider theſe privileges of our calling, and then judge what kind of converſation is worthy of it.

4. Pray aſk yourſelves likewiſe, what ſort of life he is to lead, who owns the goſpel of Chriſt for the rule of his actions, and by his very calling hath engaged himſelf to the practice of every thing which is there enjoined. Whoever hath read the goſpel, knows what kind of precepts it is made up of, and muſt be convinced that no rules of living, that were ever given

to the world before, can pretend to come near it for perfectneſs and exactneſs.

There is indeed no great ſtreſs laid there upon any kind of ceremonies or outward obſervances. God never ſet any value upon theſe in any religion. But for the things that are intrinſically good; for the things that do really perfect and adorn human nature; for the things that do accompliſh the mind and ſpirit of a man: the chriſtian inſtitution, as it is ſet forth in the goſpel, is the higheſt, the nobleſt, the exacteſt, and withal the ſevereſt that ever was ſet on foot in the world. There, all ſorts of purity and holineſs, every kind and every degree of virtue are recommended, and every thing, that hath but the appearance of vice and ſin, is diſcouraged. There, we are called upon to be *holy, as God is holy*, 1 Pet. i. 15, 16; *to be merciful, as he is merciful*, Luke vi. 36. There, even our diſorderly deſires and appetites, tho' they do not break forth into outward actions, are reproved and diſcountenanced. And it is made a ſin not only to commit adultery, to kill, or ſteal, or defraud our neighbours of their right, to do injuries, or the like; but the very workings of our minds towards theſe things (if our conſent be given to them) are declared culpable. As we muſt not commit adultery, ſo we muſt not look upon a woman to luſt after her. As we muſt not defraud our neighbour, ſo neither muſt we covet what belongs to him. As we muſt not kill, ſo neither muſt we angry without a cauſe. As we muſt not do an injury, ſo neither muſt we revenge one that is done to us. As we muſt not be ungrateful to our friends, ſo neither muſt we hate our enemies, but do them all the good we can. And thus as to all the other inſtances of our duty.

Oh,

Oh, holy religion! Oh, juſt and excellent laws! worthy to come from God, and worthy of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt to promulgate, and moſt of all worthy of us to be obſerved. And therefore let every one, who names the goſpel of Chriſt, walk worthy of this his vocation, by ſeriouſly endeavouring to bring all his thoughts, and words, and deeds, throughout the whole courſe of his life, to a conformity with the laws there delivered.

5. And, in the next place, pray aſk yourſelves how that man ought to live who profeſſes in his life to copy out the example of our Lord Jeſus? Our calling, our vocation, is to be the diſciples of Chriſt; and the very notion of being a diſciple, is to frame our way of living according to the pattern that he, whom we call our maſter, hath ſet before us. And therefore, as the apoſtle hath told us, if we pretend to be Chriſt's diſciples, we *ought to walk even as he walked*, 1 John ii. 6.

But now, if we take him for our pattern, then we may eaſily know what kind of converſation will be worthy of our calling. If we call ourſelves the diſciples of Chriſt, then we muſt be *humble, and meek, and lowly in heart*, for he was ſo in the greateſt degree, *Matt.* xi. 29. We muſt not be arrogant or aſſuming, but deſcend to the meaneſt offices of civility and charity, for the ſon of man, our Lord and Maſter, *came not to be miniſtred unto, but to miniſter*, Matt. xx. 28. We muſt think nothing below us, if we can thereby ſhew courteſy to our brethren; for the author of our religion and our happineſs did deſcend even to *the waſhing the very feet of the diſciples*, John xiii. We muſt be eaſy and gentle to all about us. Not eaſily provoked; and when we are provoked, ready to forgive the

injuries that are done us. For this was the way of our Maſter; he was never known to be put out of his temper by any perverſeneſs, any impertinence, any affront or indignity that was offered him. He was gentle to all men, patient under the greateſt ſufferings, and ſo regardleſs of injuries, that he not only forgave thoſe who had the malice to take away his life, but he heartily *prayed for them*, Luke xxiii. 34. He never fought himſelf, or his own intereſts, in any thing he did, but only the glory of God. And can you then be called his followers, who ſeek nothing but yourſelves in all your deſigns and actions? Who have no regard to God's glory, but only to what ſerves your turn beſt in the preſent circumſtances? He was full of tenderneſs and compaſſion to all who needed his help; nay, *he went about doing good*, Acts x. 38. it was the very buſineſs of his life. And can you think it becomes you his diſciples to be hard-hearted, and pityleſs, and unmerciful; to be ſurly, or ſelfiſh, or covetous; to live uſeleſly and unprofitably in your generations, when God has given you ſundry talents, ſundry means and opportunities, whereby you may do a great deal of good, and be very uſeful to others in the place and ſtation wherein God hath put you? He, tho' he was as full of employment as any man, yet he conſtantly took his times of retirement from the world, and gave up himſelf to the ſpiritual exerciſes of prayer and meditation, and communion with God: nay, he ſometimes ſpent *whole nights in thoſe exerciſes*, Luke vi. 12. And can you his diſciples pretend ſo much buſineſs that you have no leiſure for your devotions? Or can you live without any ſenſe or feeling that you have need of communion with God? And ſatisfy yourſelves if now and then you put up a few, cold, formal, heartleſs prayers

to

to him? Our Lord was very contented and thankful, and heartily reſigned to God, tho' he was very poor, and had not ſo much as *an houſe to put his head in*, Matt. viii. 20. Can it then become any of you who are his followers to be uneaſy under your preſent circumſtances, or to repine at God's diſpenſations to you? Is it decent that you ſhould be querulous or diſcontented at your condition, when your Lord and Maſter, who had as little a ſhare of worldly goods as any of you, was very thankful to God for whatever happened to him. Oh that all of us would make it a little more our buſineſs to look into our Lord's life, and obſerve how he behaved himſelf in all emergencies! What kind of life he led, and what ſpirit and temper he was of! We ſhould then be more and more convinced how purely, how holily we ought to live, if we would walk worthily of our vocation.

6. Pray aſk yourſelves further, what ſort of life he ought to lead, who by his admiſſion to this high calling has ſuch extraordinary aſſiſtance from the Holy Spirit made over to him, over and above the powers that nature hath furniſhed him with. Every one, who is a member of Chriſt, has from God a promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt to aſſiſt him in the carrying on the work of his vocation. Nay more, our Saviour has given us his Holy Spirit, not only to ſtand by us and ſupport us, but alſo to be in us, as a principle of life, to dwell within us, to take our ſouls and bodies for his habitation. So that every true chriſtian may, in the moſt proper ſenſe, be ſaid to be *a temple of God*, 1 Cor. iii. 16, a tabernacle where the Holy Spirit is pleaſed to inhabit.

Think now what is the natural conſequence we ought to draw from hence: think what infinite obli-

gations are hereby laid upon us to keep ourſelves holy and undefiled, both as to ſoul and body. Think how undecently we treat our ſacred gueſt whenever we give conſent to any wicked impure thing. Laſtly, think what glorious things are expected from us, what excellent attainments we ought to make in every virtue and grace, who have a divine power ſo near us, nay within us, to ſtrengthen us in all difficulties, to ſupport us under all tryals and temptations, and to carry us on, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, to the moſt noble undertakings and atchievements.

7. Once more, and I have done. Pray aſk yourſelves what kind of life ſhould he lead who is called out of this world, and has his name inrolled among the citizens of the other world; who, by his profeſſion, declares himſelf *to be a ſtranger and a pilgrim here, and to look for an abiding and continuing city, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, Heb. xiii. Doth it become ſuch a man to live, as God knows too many of us do? To be ſo wholly intent upon the buſineſs and deſigns of this earth, as if we were always to live upon it? To make it the work of our lives to be contriving and projecting for our ſecular conveniencies or delights, and but now and then, at ſet ſeaſons, to lift up our minds to God, and to attend the concernments of our everlaſting ſtate? To be alarmed at every thing; to be ruffled and diſcompoſed at every thing that threatens the diſturbance of our pleaſures, or the diminution of our worldly ſubſtance? I ſay, can this be thought a converſation that becomes a man who bears the character I have now given? Certainly, no: the fartheſt from it of all things. He that hath laid up his treaſures in heaven, ſhould not be much concerned about the treaſures of this earth. It becomes

comes ſuch a man to ſit looſe from the world, and all the vanities of it. He ſhould juſt uſe it as a man in a journey doth an inn, for his preſent accommodation and refreſhment, but not to ſet up his dwelling there. Heaven ſhould be the place to which all his thoughts and ſtudies ſhould tend. Thither ſhould all his deſigns and purſuits be directed. And whatever became of him here, however it ſhould pleaſe God to exerciſe him in this life, whether by poverty or riches, health or ſickneſs, a ſplendid fortune or low and mean circumſtances, all ſhould be in a manner indifferent to him, if he got but to heaven at laſt.

This now, brethren, is our caſe. Here we are in the world at preſent, and we are allowed by our gracious God to ſerve ourſelves of it, as to the uſe of all the things that tend to make our abode here tolerably eaſy and comfortable. But heaven is our home: that is the country we are in queſt of, and for the ſake of which we took upon us the profeſſion of Chriſt's diſciples: *that is the prize of our high-calling in Chriſt Jeſus*, Phil. iii. 14. Would we therefore walk ſuitably to our vocation? Let us mind that. Let us live like men of another world; (as we profeſs to be.) Let God, and heaven, and the things above, have our hearts, our deſires, our affections, while this world hath our bodies. By this means we ſhall not only ſecure to ourſelves this everlaſting never-fading inheritance, which is the end of our faith, and the hope of our calling; but we ſhall alſo make the beſt proviſion poſſible for a happy life even in this world; for Chriſt has ſolemnly promiſed us, that if we *firſt ſeek the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs all the other things we need ſhall be added unto us*,

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SERMON X.

The manner and the circumstances of the Day of Judgment.

ACTS. xvii. 31.

He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man, whom he hath ordained.

THESE words are a part of that sermon which St. Paul preach'd to the men of Athens. The design of them, as you may easily perceive, was to convince the Athenians of the necessity of leaving their idolatry and their vicious conversation, and to persuade them to a hearty return to God, by a serious repentance, and faith in the gospel; and that from this consideration, that *God had appointed a time in which he would call all men to account for their actions past*, reward the good with everlasting happiness, and punish the wicked and unbelievers with endless torments.

And

And certainly there is no other argument in the world so effectual for the persuading men to quit their ungodly courses, and to betake themselves to a serious, devout, religious life, as this of the general judgment, which shall come upon all men at the end of the world. The other arguments for repentance, drawn from the goodness of God, and the infinite kindness of our Lord Jesus, in laying down his life for us, and the folly and unreasonableness of all sin in itself, and the ill consequences that it brings upon us in this world; I say, these, and such like, tho' they are very strong in themselves, yet, God knows, thro' the horrible corruption of human nature, they have often no effect upon us: such slaves we are to our lusts, that for the love of them we can make a shift to break through all these considerations. But now, when a future judgment and the terrors of damnation are laid before us, and pressed upon us, these do come so close to our dearly beloved principle of self-preservation, and so strongly work upon our passions of fear and hope, which do most influence us, that, if they be seriously believed and considered, it is impossible for human nature to resist them. *Knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men*, 2 Cor. v. 11. So saith St. Paul, in another place, intimating, that if these do not persuade men, nothing else can. These are the last remedies to be applied to mens minds; and if they be unsuccessful, their case is desperate.

The point therefore that I now mean to speak to, is the manner and circumstances of Christ's coming to judge the world, and the proceedings of that judgment, and the consequences that will follow upon those proceedings.

Now several very considerable things our Lord Je-

sus

ſus Chriſt and his apoſtles have diſcovered to us in this matter, which are to be found interſperſed in the ſpeeches of our Lord recorded in the goſpels, and in the epiſtles of St. Paul and St. Peter, and the revelations of St. John. Theſe paſſages therefore it ſhall now be my buſineſs to collect into one view, and to reduce them under their diſtinct heads, and to make ſuch reflections upon them as every particular leads me to.

1. The firſt thing I take notice of, as to the manner and circumſtances of the day of judgment, which the ſcriptures give us an account of, is this, that it ſhall come upon the world ſuddenly and unexpectedly: thus St. Peter, (2 Pet. iii. 10.) *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, viz.* without any previous notice. It will ſurprize the world, when they think not of it, when they leaſt expect it. And our Lord, ſpeaking of that day, acquaints us, that *as a ſnare it ſhall come upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth*, Luke xxi. 35. And in another place he tells us, that *as it was in the days of Noah, ſo ſhould it be alſo in the day of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entred into the ark, and the flood came and deſtroyed them all. Likewiſe alſo as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, and drink, they bought and ſold, they planted and builded; but the ſame day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimſtone out of heaven and deſtroyed them all; even thus ſhall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed*, Luke xvii. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

Tho' in ſome of theſe expreſſions our Saviour may ſeem to have reſpect to his unexpected coming to deſtroy Jeruſalem, yet the words are not to be confined

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to that, as appears from the parallel paſſage in St. Matthew; but do mainly and principally relate to his coming to the general judgment: of which his judgment upon Jeruſalem was both a forerunner, and alſo a ſolemn figure and repreſentation. And that is the reaſon why our Saviour doth ſo often mix his diſcourſes of both theſe together.

Now this ſudden and unexpected approach of the day of judgment, how ought it to affect our hearts! how ought it to oblige us not to be taken unprovided at that day! How will it aſtoniſh and confound us, if the *bridegroom ſhould come*, and we, like the *fooliſh virgins, are faſt aſleep without oil in our lamps*, Matt. xxv. 3, 5.

Oh what amazement, what horror will ſeize us, when, in the midſt of our divertiſements and pleaſures, or in the full tide of our ſecular buſineſs, when our heads are full of other deſigns, when we are promiſing to ourſelves many fair years of happineſs, and thinking that all will go well with us, all of a ſudden to ſee the world falling in pieces about us, and ready to be buried in its own ruins, and to hear the dreadful trumpet ſummoning us to appear before our judge to give an account of all our actions! Oh! it was a dreadful word that was ſpoken to the rich man in the goſpel, who, pleaſing himſelf with the happineſs of his preſent condition, ſaid to himſelf, '*Soul, thou haſt much goods laid up for many years, take thine eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry. But, ſaith God to him, thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee*, Luke xii. 19, 20. Surely great was the horror, and bitter was the agony that the man was in when he heard this. But, alas! thus ſhall it happen to the greateſt part of the world at that day. Let us all therefore follow that advice

vice that our Saviour gives us upon this very occaſion, let us *take heed to ourſelves, leſt at any time our hearts be overcharged with ſurfeitings and drunkenneſs, and the inordinate cares of this life, and ſo that day come upon us unawares*, Luke xxi. 34. Let us *watch and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to eſcape all thoſe things that ſhall come to paſs, and to ſtand before the ſon of man*, ver. 36.

2. The ſecond particular which the ſcripture acquaints us with concerning the general judgment, is this; that the earth ſhall then be ſet on fire, and that in the moſt terrible manner imaginable. Whether this general conflagration will happen upon Chriſt's coming to judgment, or rather will be the laſt tranſaction of the judgment, the ſcripture doth not declare. But that there ſhall be ſuch a conflagration, and that this fire ſhall be for the everlaſting puniſhment both of the devil and wicked men, who will all be tumbled down into theſe lower regions, which will then be a perfect *lake* or ſea *of fire* (as the ſcripture expreſſeth it Rev. xix. 20.) is beyond all doubt. To this purpoſe let us obſerve what the apoſtle ſays, *The Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, to take vengeance of them that know not God, and obey not the goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, 2 Theſſ. i. 7.

But more expreſly this conflagration of the world is taught us in the 2d epiſtle of St. Peter, Chap. iii. 6, 7. where the apoſtle tells us, that *as the world which was of old periſhed* by an univerſal deluge of *water, ſo the heavens and the earth which are now, are kept in ſtore, reſerved unto fire againſt the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.* From whence it is plain, that at the day of judgment this world ſhall be ſet on fire,

fire, and that fire shall be for the punishment of ungodly men. Furthermore, in the verses following, he adds to the same purpose, *The day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up*, ver. 10.

If any one be at a loss to conceive how the heavens should be set on fire as well as the earth, as St. Peter three times in this chapter affirms they shall be; the difficulty will be removed by considering that the heavens here spoken of, are not those heavens in which the stars are, (in which signification we commonly use that word) but the sublunary heavens, *viz.* those lower regions of the air, wherein are the clouds and vapours and other meteors, which are here called the elements, and in which sense the heavens are frequently taken in holy scripture. Now these heavens, together with all that is in them, shall at that day pass away with a crackling noise of fire, and the earth, and all the things in it, shall be put in flames. David tells us, that *upon the wicked God shall rain fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup*, Ps. xi. 6. And our Saviour intimates the same, when he tells us, as *in the day when Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all; so shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed*, Luke xvii. 29, 30.

And now who can express the horror and confusion that shall be at that day? Who can fansy so sad and dismal a face of things, as shall then be all the world over? Could we imagine ourselves to be present, when the whole frame of nature is upon the point of dissolution, and the whole world in flames about our ears, with

with what terror and amazement ſhould we be filled? How would our hearts fail us, *and our joints be looſed, and our knees ſmite againſt each other*, (Dan. v. 6.) unleſs we were ſure we were in the number of thoſe who ſhould be wafted up to meet the bridegroom with comfort? Oh, what will then become of all impenitent ſinners! What will become of all worldly, ſenſual, ambitious, voluptuous men, who ſet up their reſt in this world, and mind nothing but their eaſe, and the gratification of their appetites, or the purſuit of their ſecular intereſts! When they ſhall ſee all that they loved, all that they admired, all that they delighted in, gone, irrecoverably gone in a moment! Laſtly, what will become of all thoſe bold profane perſons, who entertained all diſcourſes of a future judgment only with ſcoffs and deriſion! Oh, how will they find themſelves abuſed, and ſee, to their great amazement, what they would never before believe, that *there is a reward for the righteous, that there is indeed a God that judgeth the earth!* Pſ. lviii. 11.

But I paſs on to the third particular that the ſcripture acquaints us with, as to this day of judgment, and that is this:

3. That when Chriſt ſhall come to judge the world, there ſhall then be a viſible throne or tribunal erected in the air, whereon he ſhall in perſon ſit as the judge, attended with an infinite multitude of the heavenly hoſt. This is told us over and over again in the new teſtament. Thus our Saviour tells us, *when the Son of Man ſhall come in his glory, and all the angels of God with him, then ſhall he ſit upon the throne of his glory*, Matt. xxv. 31. And St. John, in his viſions of the general judgment, tells us, (Rev. xx. 4.) that *he ſaw thrones, and they ſat upon them*, that is, the angels and ſaints

saints did; *and judgment was given unto them.* And besides these thrones, (ver. 11.) *he saw a great white throne*, viz. a throne of light exceedingly magnificent and glorious; and he saw him that sat upon it, that is, our Lord Jesus; and so terrible was his majesty, that, as he there tells us, *the heaven and earth did fly away before his face.*

Furthermore, this throne of Christ is expresly called his tribunal or judgment seat, as when the apostle tells us, *that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, Rom. xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10. Now that this throne, this judgment seat shall be fixed in the air, and the general assize to be there held, which is another thing I mentioned under this particular, is clear from that passage of St. Paul, where he saith, *The Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout*; and *then, both those that are raised from the dead, and those that are alive and remain, shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*, 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

Oh now, who can express, or who can conceive the exceeding glory of this majestic appearance of our Lord Jesus, when he shall descend from heaven with mighty shouts and acclamations, with the trumpet of God, with an innumerable company of glorious angels, and shall seat himself upon his magnificent throne, encircled with all those blissful sons of light! How will it surprize the best of men! But oh, how will it confound the wicked and ungodly! If the appearance of God upon Mount Sinai, with the thunderings and lightenings which accompanied it, was so extremely terrible even to Moses, the friend of God, that, as the text tells us, *he did exceedingly quake and tremble*, Heb. xii. 21. Or if St. Paul, before his conversion, upon that little glimpse he had of that glorious light, wherein

Christ

Chriſt ſhall appear at the laſt day, was ſo aſtoniſhed, that he fell down from his horſe, and lay as a dead man: Oh, how ſhall they, who are the enemies of Chriſt, who have highly offended and provoked him, and are conſcious to themſelves of what they have deſerved from him, how ſhall they be able to abide his preſence at that day, when the glorioufneſs, and majeſty, and terribleneſs of his appearance will infinitely exceed all that the tongue of man can expreſs, or the heart of man conceive?

4. Another thing which the ſcriptures aſſure us of concerning the general judgment, is this; that then there ſhall be a perſonal appearance of all mankind before this tribunal of Chriſt. St. Paul, in the text before quoted, tells us, *we muſt all appear, we muſt all ſtand before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt*, Rom. xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10. Our Saviour tells us, that *before him ſhall be gathered all nations*, Matt. xxv. 32. And St. John, in his viſions of the judgment, tells us, (Rev. xx. 12.) that *he ſaw the dead, both ſmall and great, ſtand before God. And the ſea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them, and they were judged every man*, ver. 13. And St. Paul, 1 Theſſ. iv. 16, 17, *that the Lord ſhall deſcend from heaven with a ſhout, with the voice of the arch-angel, with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Chriſt ſhall riſe firſt; then we which are alive, and remain, ſhall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.* From theſe texts of ſcripture put together, ſeveral remarkable things may be gathered, *viz.*

(1.) In the general, that all men and women that ever have been, or are, or ſhall be in the world, ſhall, at

at the general judgment, appear in perſon before the tribunal of Chriſt.

(2.) That, in order thereto, the dead, as well thoſe in the ſea as thoſe in the earth, ſhall, by the effectual power of Chriſt, (going along with the trumpet, which ſhall then ſound) be raiſed up, and ſummoned to this general rendezvous.

(3.) From hence likewiſe it may be gathered, that all perſons ſhall not die: but thoſe that are living, when the judgment comes, ſhall be caught up alive to *meet the Lord Jeſus in the air*, 1 Theſſ. iv. 17. This is to be underſtood only of virtuous good men, ſuch as are the true diſciples of Chriſt, for to ſuch only the context reſtraineth it. The ſame obſervation may alſo be deduced from that paſſage in the 15th of the Corinthians, *Behold, I ſhew you a myſtery: we ſhall not all die; but we ſhall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the trumpet ſhall ſound*, 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

(4.) From which text we further gather, that thoſe good ſouls that ſhall be then alive, and are to be mounted up into the air, ſhall have their bodies changed in a moment, *i. e.* melted from a groſs earthly conſiſtency, to a pure, ſubtle, ſpiritual nature, ſo that they ſhall be of a contexture and temper ſuitable to thoſe pure regions where they are going to inhabit: *for fleſh and blood* (ſuch as we now have) is far too groſs and impure *to inherit the kingdom of God*, as the apoſtle there expreſſeth it, *ver.* 50. And theſe are thoſe ſpiritual, incorruptible, immortal bodies, that he ſpeaks of in that chapter, and in ſeveral other paſſages.

(5.) Laſtly, from theſe texts we obſerve further, that this general appearance at the judgment ſeat of Chriſt ſhall not be all at once: but holy men, they who

who are *dead in Chriſt, ſhall riſe firſt*, (1 Cor. xv. 24.) and, together with thoſe good people *who are alive and remain, be carried by angels with joy to meet their Saviour*, 1 Theſſ. iv. 15, 17. And after they have received their ſentence of juſtification and abſolution, they ſhall ſit with Chriſt, as his aſſiſtants, *in the judging of wicked men and the fallen angels*, 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3. and then afterwards ſhall the wicked be raiſed and brought to the tribunal.

I cannot ſtay to make any reflections on theſe obſervations, tho' they afford matter for many curious and pious ones. But I proceed to the next point.

5. That which follows upon this appearance before the tribunal, is the giving up our accounts to the judge. This St. Peter tells us: *We ſhall give an account to him, who is ready to judge the quick and the dead*, 1 Pet. iv. 5. And St. Paul, *We ſhall all ſtand before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt, and every one of us ſhall give an account of himſelf to God*, Rom. xiv. 10, 12. But of all other texts this particular is moſt lively ſet forth to us by our Saviour in the goſpel of St. Matthew, *viz.* in the parable of the maſter *that went into a far country, and called unto him his ſervants, and delivered unto them his goods*, Matt. xxv. 14, &c. giving unto one ſo many talents, and to another ſo many, to every man according to his ſtation. And after a long time the Lord comes home and reckons with them, and according to their improvements or abuſe of thoſe talents doth he proportionably reward or puniſh every one of them. So ſhall it be at the day of judgment. The Lord of all the families of the earth will call every man to account of his management here upon earth. He will enter into a ſevere ſcrutiny how we have employed all thoſe talents that he hath entruſted us with. Then

hall all the powers and faculties that have been given
s, all the favours and benefits we have enjoyed, all
he means and opportunities that have been afforded us
or the living virtuously and holily, and thereby bring-
ng honour and glory to our master, be brought into
ur view, and an account be demanded of them. He
vill account with us for our senses, how we have em-
loyed them, whether to the purposes they were given
s for, the furnishing our understandings, and the
ight governing of our bodies, or whether we have
nade them only instruments of sin, and inlets to va-
ity. He will account with us for our reason and
onscience, how we have employed them, whether we
ave done our best to improve them, and whether they
ave been faithful guides of our actions, or we have
uffered them to be abused with folly and false princi-
les, and to be led captive by our lusts and passions.
He will call us to account for our memories, how we
ave employed them, whether we have been careful
o treasure up in them such things as might be useful
o our lives, or have only made them the repositories
f things idle, and impertinent, and unprofitable. He
will call us to account how we have spent our time in
his world, whether we have employed it to good pur-
oses, in an honest laborious pursuit of a lawful call-
ng, setting a due portion thereof apart for the more
mmediate service of God, and spending the remainder
nnocently and wisely; or we have squander'd it away
n idleness, in play, in revelling, in impertinent or vi-
cious conversation, in the neglect of our main business.
He will call us to account for the good creatures he
hath from time to time bestowed upon us for our sup-
port and refreshment, how we have employed them:
whether we have used them thankfully, and soberly,

with

with temperance and moderation, or we have abuſed them to luxury and exceſs, to gluttony or drunkenneſs making therewith *proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſt thereof*, Rom. xiii. 14. He will call us to account for our learning and intellectual accompliſhments, for the advantages of our education, for our health and ſtrength, for our wealth and riches, for our greatneſs power, and reputation, and all thoſe ſpecial and eminent talents that he hath entruſted us with above others how we have employed them, whether we have made them inſtruments of doing a great deal of good, and being eminently uſeful in our generation, or they have only miniſtred to pride, and vanity, and ſelf-pleaſing, if not to the worſe purpoſes of vice and wickedneſs. Laſtly, he will call us to account for all the opportunities of grace and means of ſalvation which we have enjoyed; for all the good counſels and wiſe exhortations that have been given us; for the revelation of his Son that hath been made known to us; for the uſe of his word and ſacraments; for all the motions and ſuggeſtions of his Holy Spirit within us, diſſuading us from ſin, and alluring and ſolliciting us to a courſe of virtue and holineſs: for all theſe, I ſay, he will call us to account how we have employed them; whether we have improved them to the purpoſes they were given for, as we ſhould have done; whether we have grown in grace, and brought forth fruit ſuitable to ſo many helps and advantages, or have been idle and *unprofitable ſervants*, Matt. xxv. 30. Theſe, and a great many other things, which we now ſcarce think of, ſhall we be accountable for to the judge at that day. And then ſhall all our actions, good or bad, the moſt ſecret as well as thoſe that were public, be inquired into. Then ſhall all the intents, and thoughts, and deſigns of our hearts be reveal'd

veal'd and thoroughly ſcann'd; for this is the *day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*, Rom. ii. 5. Then ſhall the wiſdom and the juſtice of the divine providence appear eminently to all the world, in *rewarding every man according to his works*, Matt. xvi. 27. In vain will it be then to expect favour, any otherwiſe than as we have laid the grounds for it by our repentance in this life; for we are then before an impartial tribunal. In vain will it be for us to think of ſhuffling and evading; for however we may by our artifices blind the eyes of men in this world, yet we have one to deal with then, who can eaſily ſee thro' all our ſhifts and diſguiſes. In vain will it be to endeavour to conceal any thing at that day, for *all things are naked and open to the eye of him with whom we have to do*, Heb. iv. 13. Nay, then our conſciences will be as a thouſand witneſſes, either for the acquitting or condemning us; and will bring to our remembrance the whole ſeries of our actions, as freſh as if they were but newly done. All thoſe ſins which we here made it our buſineſs to forget as ſoon as we could, ſhall then, with all their aggravating circumſtances, be ſet in order before us. Nay, then ſhall all our actions, even thoſe that we are moſt aſhamed of, thoſe that we always uſed the greateſt care to conceal from the knowledge of others, be expoſed to the view of the whole world. Our hearts ſhall then be laid open, and angels and men ſhall ſee what principles and deſigns they were that influenced our actions. This the ſcripture fully aſſures us of, telling us, that when *God comes to judge the world, he will both bring to light the hidden things of darkneſs, and will make manifeſt the counſels of the heart*, 1 Cor. iv. 5. And in another place, *God ſhall bring every work into judgment, with*

every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil, Eccles. xii. 4.

6. But I hasten to the last particular which the scripture acquaints us with concerning this matter; and with it I shall shut up this discourse: and that is, the final sentence that shall follow upon this examination and discovery of all actions, and the execution of that sentence. This sentence is two-fold, according to the two different states of men that shall be found at that day; *viz.* the sentence of absolution, and that shall be pronounced upon all the godly; and the sentence of condemnation, and that shall be pronounced upon all the wicked, and upon the apostate angels. Both these we have fully declared in the 25th of St. Matthew so often mentioned; *The King shall say to them on the right hand, come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*, ver 34. And then follows the sentence of condemnation a little further; *He shall say unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*, ver 41. And then, in the last verse follows the execution of both these sentences, *These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

Oh! the infinite and inexpressible horror, and confusion, and anguish, and despair, that will seize upon all wicked and ungodly persons when this shall come upon them. When they shall hear the judge pronounce that terrible sentence, and at the same time find themselves dragg'd away to suffer it in extremity, *depart from me ye cursed.* Oh, dreadful words! Depart from him who is the life of our lives! and without whose presence and comfortable influence, it is infinitely more desireable not to be at all, than to live and have the

who

whole world. Time indeed hath been, when they have often bid God to depart from them; when they desired nothing more, than to keep as far from him as they could, and endeavoured nothing more, than that he should not be in their thoughts. But they will not always be abused and cheated with these false notions. They will then be awakened, and their understandings will faithfully represent to them what an unspeakable loss it is to be deprived of the presence of God. They will then see clearly (tho' too late) what a mighty happiness the saints enjoy, in loving, in adoring, in admiring his infinite majesty, and in being filled with the sense of his love, and enravished with the perpetual emanations of his goodness. They will then find, that to depart from God is to be miserable in the highest degree, is to lose all pleasure, all comfort, all peace, all hopes of these things for ever; to be exposed to the gnawing of a worm that never dies; to be let loose to the whips and the stings, the rage and the fury of a deeply sensible, and too much enlighten'd conscience. But this is not all, tho' it be sad enough: to their affliction for what they have lost, what they are deprived of, shall be superadded an exquisite pain to their very senses; that their torments may be every way compleat, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.* What more terrible to flesh and blood than fire? But to be tormented in everlasting fire, in fire unquenchable, who can bear the thoughts of it? For those tender limbs of theirs, which they now use with so much delicacy, to be henceforward stretched out upon a bed of flame: for those palates of theirs, which they are now so careful and curious to gratify, to want hereafter a drop of water to cool the insupportable heat of them: for them, who in this world mind-

ed nothing so much as the living at their ease, and enjoying their pleasures, from henceforth to dwell with everlasting burnings; to be tumbled down into a lake that burns with fire and brimstone for ever: oh, how amazing, how intolerable is the very consideration! Especially when we consider what companions, what comforters they are likely to have in this their misery, even no better than the damned fiends. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, *prepared for the devil and his angels.* These indeed are their proper territories; this lake of fire was principally designed for them, for their first foul rebellion against God. But God Almighty intended mankind for better fortunes. But since they (those I mean of whom I am now speaking) wilfully forsook their heavenly Father, and made themselves the servants of the devil, his slaves they shall be to all eternity; and he will pay them their wages for all the drudgery they have so faithfully done him. But alas! no otherwise, than by adding vinegar to their wounds, by reproaching their folly, and increasing their torments, and making hell, if it be possible, more insupportable than it is.

Oh now, who can conceive the sad condition of those poor forlorn creatures! Who can number the groans and the plaints, the roarings and the howlings, the curses and imprecations, which, out of the anguish of their souls, they do continually belch out against God, against themselves, and against all the world! Oh, how they do curse their own folly and madness! How bitterly do they reflect upon their past lives! How do they wish that they had thought on these things in time! What would they not give for one day, one hour, of all that precious time that they have lavished away so foolishly, that, if it were possible, they might

might make their peace with God, and even grow to the ground in humble ſupplications for his mercy and forgiveneſs! But, alas! it is too late; the irrevocable ſentence is paſt; their eternal ſtate is concluded; never, never muſt they hope to change their condition; and this they know. And this is that which every moment adds new torments to their torments. Oh, that we, who now hear theſe things, would ſeriouſly conſider them! Now, while God affords us our lives, and the means of ſalvation, and the hopes of his favour. And oh, that we would conſider them ſo long, till we be effectually wrought upon to change our courſe of living (if we do not already live as we ſhould do) and apply ourſelves to a ſerious and diligent purſuit of holineſs and virtue, that we may never come into this place of torment! But when our Lord ſhall come to judge the world, we may be found in the number of the ſheep on his right hand, upon whom he will pronounce that happy ſentence of abſolution, *Come, ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

Oh bleſſed, beyond all imagination bleſſed, are thoſe happy ſouls to whom theſe words ſhall be pronounced! How abundantly will they think themſelves rewarded for all the troubles they here endured; for all the pains they took in the ways of virtue and piety; for all the ſcoffs they met with from profane, irreligious, atheiſtical men, who laughed at their preciſeneſs (as they called it) and their zeal for God and religion!

Their time of tryal is now paſt, and now they come to be crowned. Now do they mount up with Jeſus their beloved maſter, and *with an innumerable company of angels, and with all the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, into the New Jeruſalem,* Heb. xii. 22, 23.

Into blisful regions, into a country of perpetual light and peace, where there is no darkness, no mists or storms to which this under world is always obnoxious; *No need of the sun or moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it*, Rev. xxi. 23. Here is the city of the great King: the seat of the Majesty of heaven. Here shall they live in his presence, and be in the number of his favourites, and behold the wisdom of his government, and the admirable contrivance of all his works. Here shall they be ravished with the beauty of his holiness, and the brightness of his understanding, and the largeness of his love; his uncorrupted justice, and his infinite unexhausted goodness. Here shall they love him and their Saviour as much as they are able, and they shall still be able to know him, and to love him more and more. For all their faculties will be enlarged, and grow so capacious, that they will bear some proportion to that infinite good which is to fill them. In a word; here shall they spend a whole eternity in an exstacy of joy, in an uninterrupted succession of pleasures, in the best natured and most agreeable company in the world; angels, and arch-angels, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, all their dear friends and acquaintance, who die in the faith of Christ, and in the fear of God; and all those brave souls likewise whom they have heard or read of, whose virtue and rare actions have made them famous over the world. And the employment of the whole glorious society shall ever be to love, and to serve one another as much as ever they can, and all to join together in singing endless praises and *hallelujahs to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for evermore*, Rev. vii. 10.

I can say no more. We are lost if we go further. *O thou blessed God, who hast prepared for them that love*

love thee, ſuch things as paſs man's underſtanding, pour into our hearts ſuch love towards thee, that we, truly repenting of our ſins, and quiting all the paths of folly and wickedneſs, whereby we have gone aſtray from thee, and ſeriouſly endeavouring to keep all thy holy commandments, and thereby ſhewing that we love thee above all things, *may at laſt obtain thoſe heavenly promiſes of thine, which exceed all that we can deſire:* and when our Lord ſhall come to judge the world, *we may be found acceptable in his ſight.* Amen.

SERMON XI.

About religious resolutions. The great caution that should be observed in making them.

JOSHUA XXIV. 21.

And the people said unto Joshua, nay, but we will serve the Lord.

THE occasion of these words was this: Joshua having brought the people of Israel into a peaceable possession of the promised land, and *being now grown old, and ready to leave this world*, Chap. xxiii. ver. 1, 2. as the last and greatest kindness he could do for that people, he *calls together all their elders, and their heads, and their judges, and their officers*, ver. 2. Ch. xxiv. 1. which represented them, in order to the entring them into a strict covenant, that they should give themselves up to the service of God. Being met together, he makes a discourse concerning the great things that God had done for them. He sets before them, *how that whereas their forefathers had been idolaters on the other side of the flood*, Chap. xxiv. 2. God, in mercy to them,

them, ſingled out *Abraham their father, and brought him into the land of Canaan*, and taught him the true religion, *and multiplied his ſeed*, verſe 3. And after many kindneſſes ſhewed to their predeceſſors, *he had brought them out of the Egyptian ſlavery by a mighty hand and ſtretched-out arm*, ver. 5, 6, 7. had led them marvelouſly through the wilderneſs, and had now at the laſt, by his (viz. Joſhua's) conduct, *brought them ſafe into a land flowing with milk and honey*, ver. 8.—13. Notwithſtanding all the ſtrength and policy that the neighbouring nations had uſed to hinder their paſſage, and all the power that thirty and two kings within the land could make for the deſtroying of them.——Wherefore having ſuch great obligations laid upon them by God, ſuch as never any nation before them had, they were wondrouſly ungrateful to their great Benefactor, if they did not yield up themſelves intirely to his ſervice, if they did not *fear the Lord, and walk before him in ſincerity and truth, and put away the ſtrange Gods which their fathers had ſerved*, ver. 14. This is the ſum of the firſt fourteen verſes of this chapter. But, continues he, in the 15th verſe, *If it ſeem evil to you to ſerve the Lord, chuſe you this day whom you will ſerve; whether the gods which your fathers ſerved that were on the other ſide of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whoſe land ye dwell: but as for me and my houſe we will ſerve the Lord.* As if he had ſaid, It is not my purpoſe to do any violence to you, or to force your inclinations. You have heard my arguments. I leave it to you, whether you will be perſuaded by them. You yourſelves muſt chuſe whether you will ſerve the Lord, or ſerve other Gods. But I declare to you, whatever you

pitch upon, it is my reſolution, that I and my family will ſerve the Lord, and him only.

The people, as appears in the two next verſes, were perfectly convinced by his diſcourſes, acknowledged the obligations they ſtood in to the Lord, and were ſo ſenſible of them, that they cried out, *God forbid that we ſhould forſake the Lord, to ſerve other gods*, verſe 16. But Joſhua thinks fit to try them further: he would not have them enſnared into reſolutions, but would have them ſeriouſly to conſider to what ſevere things they obliged themſelves, if they determined their choice to the ſervice of God. To this purpoſe he tells them, *Ye cannot ſerve the Lord, for he is an holy God, a jealous God: he will not forgive your tranſgreſſions nor your ſins. If ye forſake the Lord and ſerve ſtrange gods, then he will do you hurt and conſume you, after that he hath done you good*, ver. 19, 20. But the people were not diſcouraged by this, but ſtood to their firſt determination, and with one voice cried out in the words of the text, *nay, but we will ſerve the Lord*, ver. 21, 24. This was their laſt reſolution; and upon this Joſhua made them that day enter *into a covenant* with the Lord, ver 25.

I doubt not but a great many here preſent are ſo well inclined to the ſervice of God, that they are ready to make the ſame declaration, to take up the ſame reſolution, that the Iſraelites here did. They are ſo ſenſible of the folly and miſchievous conſequences of a ſinful life, and the infinite obligation that God hath laid upon them to live virtuouſly and religiouſly, that they do fully purpoſe, with the grace of God, to quit all their evil courſes, and to devote themſelves to God's ſervice; to forſake all the idol gods which the men of the world worſhip, and which they renounced

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at their baptism, and, as Joshua here words it, *to walk before the Lord* (the remaining part of their days) *in sincerity and truth*, verse 14. I say, I doubt not but a great many among us are ready to make such resolutions as these. And, to be sure, whenever they come to the holy sacrament, they do actually make them. May God Almighty bless and prosper all such as are thus religiously disposed; all such as can thus say with the Israelites, *nay, but we will serve the Lord.* But this it is fit they should be forewarned of, which Joshua insinuates to the Israelites, that it is a much easier matter to make resolutions about serving God, than to perform them after they are made. And consequently they, who mean to have their resolutions come to any effect, will be extremely concerned both to use their utmost prudence and consideration in the forming of them, and their utmost care and diligence in the keeping them afterwards.

These are the two points upon which the success of our pious desires and endeavours doth all in all depend. For which reason I think I cannot do better service to well-disposed persons, than to offer something for their assistance and direction in both these matters.

Two things I shall endeavour at this time:

First, To shew what rules are to be observed by us in the framing our good resolutions. And,

Secondly, What things are to be taken care of after we have framed them, that they may produce real effects.

I begin with the first point, *viz.*

I. The rules that are to be observed by us in making our resolutions. They are these five following:

1. That a man thoroughly consider the matter he resolves upon, and of the arguments that may be urged for and against it.
2. That he consider likewise his own temper and humour when he doth resolve.
3. That he make his resolutions as particular as may be.
4. That he not only resolve upon the end, but upon the means likewise of attaining that end.
5. That he be prudent in his resolutions, and do not burden himself with unnecessary things.

Of these five particulars as briefly as I can.

1. The first rule is, that we thoroughly consider of the matter we resolve upon, and of the arguments that may be urged for or against it. This, you see, was the method that Joshua took with the children of Israel, when he had a mind to fix them as firmly as was possible to the service of God. He laid before them the difficulty on both sides of the question, and then bid them chuse whom they would serve. Before he would enter them into this covenant, he lays the matter impartially before them; and as on one side he represents to them the infinite obligations they had to engage themselves to God's service, and the mighty advantages they would receive from it; so on the other side he sets before them the difficulties they must expect to encounter if they did engage in it, and that both upon account of the great strictness it required, and of the heavy judgments they brought upon themselves if they were false to their vows: *Ye cannot*, says he, *serve the Lord; for he is a holy God, a jealous God: he will not pardon your transgressions nor your sins*, verse 19. Now when he had laid this matter before them, he leaves it to them to determine themselves:

selves: *If it seem evil unto you* (says he, verse 15.) *to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell.*

Now thus we must deal with ourselves, if ever we mean to make firm resolutions about any thing. It is the fault and the infelicity of a great many, that they take up resolutions upon the consideration of a very few particulars. They chuse their side before they have attended to what may be said on the other side. Now tho' they happen to chuse the right side, yet, when afterwards something comes to be fairly represented to them to the disadvantage of it, which they never considered or thought of before, it often falls out that they are wholly surprized and at a loss; and if the resolutions they have taken up, prove to be against the grain of their former customs or inclinations, it is ten to one but they fall to nothing, and nature will have its course, tho' possibly the difficulty that occasions their relapse, is very inconsiderable, and easily answered.

It may be you have spent some time in considering the unexceptionable reasonableness of virtue and religion in general, and this hath made great impressions upon you; especially you are affected with the many comforts and conveniencies both as to mind, body, and estate, that it is attended with in this world, besides the vast unspeakable rewards which are promised to all those, who practise it, in the world to come. Upon these considerations you set up your resolutions. You will forsake all your vicious courses; you will live virtuously, and serve God heartily, ay, that you will. But this is but one side of the case

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that you have repreſented to yourſelves. Have you on the other hand conſidered the pains and the uneaſineſs that this courſe of life will put you upon; eſpecially at the beginning, and in caſe you have been heretofore engaged in a contrary way? Have you thought what it is *to cut off a right hand*, or *to pluck out a right eye* (as our Saviour expreſſeth it, Matt. v. 29. and xviii. 8.)? What it is to live in a contradiction to your moſt natural inclinations, and to debar yourſelves of thoſe things that you now moſt love and hanker after? Beſides, are you provided to anſwer all thoſe objections and arguments which will on every ſide be made uſe of to divert you from the courſe you are undertaking? The queſtion will, without doubt be put to you, what certainty you have of the truth of this religion that you make ſuch a ſtir about? Nay, whether it be not probable, that all the buſineſs of rewards and puniſhments in another world is but mere talk and noiſe, the invention of the prieſts or ſtateſmen? Is your faith now ſtrong enough to bear up againſt theſe aſſaults? Further yet; it may be, it will be inſinuated to you, that you need not take ſo much pains, or lead a life of ſuch ſtrictneſs, and regularity, and devotion, as you aim at, but that you may go to heaven without all this ado: how now are you prepared to repel theſe temptations?

But if theſe things do not divert you, are you ſure it is not above your ſtrength and ability to go thro' this work after you have undertaken it? Is it in your power, think you, if you ſhould ſeriouſly endeavour it, to get ſuch a maſtery over your paſſions, and to live a life of ſuch temperance, and chaſtity, and humility, and charity, and reſignation to God, as your religion will oblige you to? But admitting that nothing

thing of this discourages you, are you sure, in the last place, that you are proof against the many outward difficulties and discouragements that possibly may be thrown in your way upon account of your religion? For it is not always sun-shine in this world with pious men, tho' for the most part it is. Times have come, and may come again, when the best treatment you will meet with for your strict profession of religion will be the derision, and reproaches, and persecutions of all about you. Thus it fared with our Saviour, and with the best of his disciples for some years together. How now are you armed, how are you prepared against these attacks? It is impossible you should be to any purpose, unless you have well thought of them before-hand. But if you have considered them, and yet find your resolutions firm and unshaken, it is a good sign they are rightly made. On the contrary, if you have not considered them, it is to be feared your good purposes may fail you in the hour of temptation; and you will meet with no better success in your undertaking, than that foolish builder in the gospel, that our Saviour speaks of, who began *to build a tower*, but *did not sit down first and compute the charges it would put him to, and whether he had ability to support them; but laid the foundation at adventure, and afterwards was not able to finish it. So that all who beheld it began to mock him, saying, this man began to build, but was not able to finish*, Luke xiv. 28, 29, 30.

2. But, secondly, as we ought to have a particular consideration of things themselves, so also ought we to have of our own humours and tempers when we are a making good resolutions. By not attending to this, a man is often deceived in his devout purposes, taking those

thoſe to be firm and ſincere ones, which really are not ſo. We are not always equally capable of religious impreſſions, but are much better diſpoſed for them at ſome times than at others. A good book, or a warm diſcourſe, may often put a man into a ſtrange devout frame, and then he can reſolve any thing; but when he is cool again, he has forgot all. A ſharp affliction likewiſe, or a fit of ſickneſs, or the apprehenſion of any ſudden danger, doth often make us wonderful ſerious and ſenſible of our follies paſt, and full of good purpoſes to change our courſe of life. But then theſe purpoſes and impreſſions do uſually vaniſh with the things that cauſed them; when the preſent apprehenſions and terrors are over, we are the ſame men that we were before. Nay, even a man's ſins, and the full gratifications of his luſts, will naturally work in him a preſent deteſtation of them. Having newly ſatisfied his appetites, all his deſires and expectations are over, and the man is cloyed, and then he begins to reflect upon the vanity and ſinfulneſs of ſuch kind of courſes, and he reſolves to be guilty of them no more. But this laſts but for a ſhort while; as his uſual temper and temptations return, ſo the ſame appetites return with them, and they muſt again, in ſpite of his late reſolution, have their uſual ſatisfactions. It is no wonder that all the reſolutions that are made in ſuch circumſtances as theſe, prove generally very idle and inſignificant. For the man is not himſelf when he makes them. He is in a preternatural ſtate: he is in the heat and tranſport of a paſſion. If he will reſolve to purpoſe, he muſt reſolve in cold blood, as well as when he is heated by ſome extraordinary occaſion.

Never therefore let any one truſt to his pious reſolutions, unleſs he have tried how they appear to him,

how he approves of them, how they fit his mind in all kind of tempers and humours. It is in this case as it is in matters of sense; there are some objects which, if you look upon only in one kind of light, you will hardly avoid your being mistaken in your judgment about them. As you must put them into all their various postures, so must you view them in all sorts of lights, if you mean to form true, steady ideas of them.

I am not indeed at all for discouraging those devotional fits (as I may call them:) on the contrary, I would have every one do their endeavours to raise up themselves into that temper as often as they can. For such sudden heats do really sometimes prove the beginnings of a lasting virtue. They are the occasions that put a man upon thinking. And the impressions that are then left upon his spirit (if there be due care taken to cherish and preserve them) may be effectual, by the grace of God, for the new modelling his mind, and quite altering the whole state and frame of his life. But this I say, if we mean that our resolutions should be pertinent, and not vanish like the morning dew, we must not think it sufficient to resolve in a fit or an humour, but we must, when we are cool and sedate, and the accidental violence is off from our spirits, review our resolutions, and canvas them over and over again. And if we then find ourselves to approve of them, and in all tempers, and dispositions, and circumstances, have the same earnestness, and desire and vigour of mind to pursue them, it is a good sign that they were well formed, and that we shall proceed prosperously in them.

3. But another thing fit to be observ'd is, that we do not content ourselves with resolving in general, but that our resolutions be as particular as may be. It is not enough to make our purposes in the gross; to say,

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as the Iſraelites did to Joſhua upon the fore-mentioned Occaſion, *Nay, but we will ſerve the Lord*, we will be good, we will break off our ſins, and enter upon a new courſe of life: alas! all this is but ſhooting at rovers. If we mean to hit the mark, we muſt take more particular aims. He who thinks to get the maſtery over his ſins and evil habits, only by making general reſolutions againſt them, is juſt like the man who hopes to be victorious in the fight he is engaged in, merely by making a general ſtout reſiſtance againſt his enemies, tho' he beſtow all his blows at random, neither attending to the advantages that are offered him, nor regarding the diſadvantages to which he himſelf muſt lie open. It will therefore concern us, when we are framing reſolutions, to live a holy life, to examine well the ſtate of our own ſouls. To ſee where we are weak, and obnoxious, and where we are pretty well able to defend ourſelves, and accordingly to make proviſion. To enquire what particular ſins our temper, or our education, or our buſineſs, or our evil cuſtoms do moſt incline us to, what are the moſt reigning luſts and vices in us, and to fortify our minds moſt particularly againſt them. Do we find that worldly-mindedneſs, covetouſneſs, or the diſtruſt of God's providence, is the prevailing ſin that enſlaves us? Let us, in the forming reſolutions, have a ſpecial regard to the ſubduing that vice. Are we by our tempers inclined to eaſe, or pleaſure, or too free a gratification of our ſenſual appetites? And this humour of ours we find doth betray us into the great inconveniencies of our lives? Why, above all things, we ſhould take care to keep a ſtrict guard over ourſelves as to that point, and endeavour to work our minds to the ſtrongeſt reſolutions of a ſevere ſobriety and temperance. And ſo in all other things.

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But this is not all I intend under this consideration. Tho' it is fit, that in making up our resolution, we should have a principal regard to the leading predominant sins of our life, and those infirmities of our temper that do us most mischief, yet we must not neglect to provide against our other sins and weaknesses. And therefore it will not be amiss, when we are about this great work, that we make it our business to search, as particularly as we can, into all the several heads and branches of our duty, both towards God, and towards our neighbour, and towards ourselves. And when we have done this, to call ourselves to account how we have performed it; what part of it we have most notoriously omitted, and what part of it we have transgressed by notorious actual sins; and then, accordingly as our conscience gives in evidence to us concerning these matters, we are to take up particular resolutions to be careful for the future, both to do those things which we find we have hitherto been negligent in, and to avoid those things wherein we have hitherto transgressed. By observing this course, we shall have done ourselves very great service, whenever we come to bring our resolutions into action. For this is the best method both to secure our performance of them, and also to perform them with the least labour and trouble. For by this means, as we are especially fortified against those enemies of ours that are most treacherous, and have most power to do us mischief (*viz.* the sins of our tempers and constitutions;) so also are we provided against every other lust that make an assault upon us, nor will it be in the power of any of them easily to surprize us.

4. Another thing we are to observe in the forming our resolutions, is this; that we should not only resolve upon such and such particular things to be done or to be avoided

avoided by us, but we should also consider how those things are to be done or to be avoided. What are the propereſt methods and expedients for the effecting of our purposes, and to resolve upon them also. He who resolves upon the end, and pitcheth not upon the means for the attaining that end, doth but half his work. You find, it may be, that the great sin of your life is intemperance, or that which we call too much good-fellowship; and you make most strict and particular resolutions to avoid that sin for the future: if now you would take the right course to have those resolutions effectual, it will be fit you should enquire what are the great occasions and temptations that draw you into this sin. After you have found them, examine further whether those occasions and temptations are of your own making, and such as you may easily prevent or avoid, if you please, or whether they are unavoidably incident to your business or calling, or the like. If they be of the former sort, you must resolve quite to cut them off, or to keep out of the way of them. It is an idle thing to think of practising sobriety and temperance so long as we encourage the occasions, and throw ourselves into the temptations that cause our intemperance. But if we find that these temptations are really such as we cannot avoid, but they lie in the course of our necessary business and employments, then we are to secure ourselves against this vice another way; not by flying the temptations, but by standing upon our guard, which is done either by wholly denying our appetites in what they desire, or by confining them to such precise measures of meat and drink, which they shall not exceed. —And thus again. Is anger, and wrathfulness, and impatience the great sin we mean to set ourselves against? Why, it is not enough to resolve, "I will not

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" be angry, nothing shall put me into a passion; but " we must likewise resolve thus, Such and such things " are very apt to provoke me, and put me out of tem- " per, and therefore I will keep out of the way of " them. Or, I find that it is the too sudden and free " venting of my mind when I am provoked, that " blows me into those unseemly fits of rage and fury; " and therefore, I am resolved, when the next provo- " cation is offered me, I will seal up my lips for some " time, and either speak nothing at all, or speak mild " and gentle words."

Thus should we do as to every instance of our duty we resolve upon, or every sin we resolve against: inquire into the best means and expedients for the securing of the one, and mortifying the other, and put them into our resolutions also.

5. But, in the last place, in the forming our resolutions we must be mighty careful not to clog them with too many needless, uncommanded things. What is absolutely necessary for the securing our virtue and obedience to God's laws, it is fit should be very firmly and particularly resolved by us. But for other things, tho' they may be sometimes very convenient, and may prove, if discreetly used, excellent instruments for the promoting virtue and goodness; yet, if they be no direct parts of our duty imposed upon us by God, or necessarily required as means for the performing that duty, it will be very dangerous to tye them upon ourselves, especially for any long time. Let no man therefore, especially no young beginner in religion, easily put more impositions upon himself, than God has put upon him. Let him not abridge himself of that liberty which Christ hath left him. If he bind himself to all that is barely needful to preserve his innocence, and se-

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cure the performance of his duty, it is enough for one in his circumstances. But if he will make resolutions, that he will, for instance, spend so great a portion of his time in prayer, that he will read so much of a good book every day, that he will fast so often, that he will wholly abstain from such and such particular things that are not in themselves evil; I say, in my opinion, he doth not act prudently in so doing; for these kind of things do generally prove a snare to those who use them. They make the work of religion intolerably heavy and troublesome; and a man, in a little time, grows so weary of them, that he repents he ever bound up himself to them: and it is ten to one but in some humour or other he will launch out and break all his fences of this kind. And when he hath done so, it is odds but he goes farther, and lets fall those very resolutions he made of necessary indispensible virtue and holiness. Certainly the being false to his vows of one kind, will mightily dispose him to be so to those of the other, since he hath obliged himself equally to both. And sad experience shews, that this indeed too often comes to pass. If therefore a man thinks of tying up himself as to these indifferent matters, as believing that the so doing will be a good guard to his virtue, let him take good advice before he doth it; and especially let him oblige himself but for a little time, since, if he finds his resolutions expedient, he may repeat them when he pleases. But if he make resolutions for a long time, he cannot, if he finds them inconvenient, so easily undo them again.

What I have hitherto said, has been wholly concerning the forming of our resolutions of virtue and an holy life. But there are some things that concern the government of ourselves after we have actually taken up those

those resolutions, that are every whit as necessary to the good success of them, as the former points.

II. To give you some account of these, is the second point I undertook in this discourse; of which I shall speak very briefly.

1. In the first place therefore, let us not think it sufficient to have made wise, and strong, and good resolutions once for all, unless we frequently renew them. The firmest and the best contrived purposes will, in time and by degrees, grow very feeble, and languid, and lose all the force they should have upon us, if we do not take care to put new life into them, by over and over again impressing them upon our own minds, and repeating all the arguments and considerations that at first prevailed with us to take them up. It will therefore highly concern us, after we are once entred into hearty and settled resolutions to serve God, never to let them cool, but to keep up the fire that is kindled in our hearts, by constantly ministring fuel to it. To this end, let us every day we rise, enter into a serious consideration of the obligations we have laid upon ourselves. Let us ask our hearts how they now stand inclined towards them. They were very forward at first to undertake the service of God; do they still continue so? Are they as full of hatred and detestation of sin, and as vigorously bent to pursue the paths of virtue and religion, as they were when they lately enter'd into covenant with God? If we find that they flag and waver, and cannot answer us with that briskness that before they did; we will be good, we will live virtuously, we will serve God.— Let us ply them with arguments; let us lay before them the mighty obligations they had at first to undertake this great work, and convince them, that they have the same obligations to persevere

in it. Let us beg of them to conſider how infinitely good God is in himſelf, and how infinitely kind and bountiful he hath been to us every moment of our lives; and conſequently how juſt and reaſonable it is, that we ſhould for ever give up ourſelves to the ſervice of him. Let us repreſent to them, how righteous, how good, how equitable all his laws are; how much the obſervance of them tends to our advantage; inſomuch that it is infinitely more our intereſt than God's, that we ſhould yield a due obedience to them. Let us perſuade them of the great folly and vanity, and the intolerable miſchiefs and inconveniencies that do attend thoſe courſes we have formerly purſued, and which it ſeems they have now a deſire to return to again. Let us lay before them how much pain, and grief, and anguiſh, and ſorrow it coſt our bleſſed Saviour to redeem us from our vain converſation; and to purchaſe for us the pardon of thoſe curſed ſins of ours, which we are now meditating to take again into our boſom. If all this will not work upon our hearts, let them be further remembred that they are now actually engaged in God's ſervice, and have, by the moſt ſolemn vows in the world, obliged themſelves to continue in it, and therefore it is now too late to look back. To be guilty of ſo baſe a perfidiouſneſs, as it will be a moſt horrid crime, ſo will the vengeance of God not fail to purſue us for it. Beſides, now we are in a fair way to attain heaven and eternal happineſs, a good beginning being in a manner half the work: But if we fall back, we have loſt all the pains we have already taken in raiſing up ourſelves to this pitch, and are but juſt where we were before we begun this buſineſs. And who knows whether we ſhall ever be able to begin it again? Who knows whether ever God will again afford us either the grace or the

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means to do it? If, notwithstanding all this, your hearts are yet heavy, and untoward, and unwilling to go on in this work, you must tell them plainly, that they must go on, there is an absolute necessity for it. This is a business that concerns you as much as your souls are worth. Your everlasting salvation or damnation depends upon it, and therefore there is no dallying in the matter. In a word, we must never leave ourselves till we have so fired our hearts, that they resolve with all alacrity to go on as they have begun: that they tell us peremptorily, I will go to my Father. I will be good whatever it costs me. I will stand to my vows, what opposition soever I meet with. I will never forsake the service of my God; and particularly this following day I will so take heed to all my ways, that I will not offend against any of my purposes.

Oh! my brethren, if we would but thus frequently commune with our own hearts, and daily thus reinforce our good resolutions, how easy would it be for us to be good! How easy to vanquish all our evil habits, and to triumph over every thing that opposeth us! Nay, I may say, how hard a matter would it be for us to be bad! We should subvert all difficulties, and every day grow better and better, till at last we had got as obstinate confirmed habits of virtue and goodness, as other men now have, or we ourselves before had, of vice and sin.

2. Especially if we join another thing, which I come now to mention, *viz.* If we mean our resolutions should bring forth those good fruits we make them for, we must remember that there is another necessary duty to be performed by us, and that is, daily and constant prayer to God Almighty, for his grace and Holy Spirit to go along with us in the great work we have under-

taken. Alas! we are of ourſelves poor frail creatures. The firmeſt reſolutions we have made, the ſtrongeſt guard we have placed about ourſelves, will not protect us from the deceitfulneſs of our own hearts, and the ſubtilty of our enemies, and the ſtrength of the temptations with which we are continually aſſaulted, without the aſſiſtance and influence of the Holy Spirit of Chriſt. Now the only method we can take for the alluring that divine Spirit down into our hearts, is, as our Lord Jeſus hath told us, humble, and ſerious, and fervent prayer. God will no more deny that good Spirit to all who thus aſk it, than a father will deny bread to his hungry children, when they cry for it. If ever therefore we mean to proceed happily in what we have undertaken, and to bring our reſolutions to effect, let this ſink down into our hearts. We muſt be no ſtrangers at the throne of grace. We muſt apply there every day as conſtantly as we do every day eat, drink, and ſleep. We muſt no more live a day without praying, than we do without taking our food and nouriſhment. And when we are before God in this holy exerciſe, whether it be in the church, or in our cloſets, or in any other place, C let us then and there pour out our ſouls to him with al humility, acknowledging our own vileneſs, and repreſenting to him our various wants and neceſſities, an begging a ſupply of them from his infinite bounty with as much earneſtneſs and concernedneſs, as an hungry beggar begs alms at our doors. Let us tell hi how extremely ſenſible we are of our great infirmitie and eaſineſs of nature. We dare not truſt our ow hearts; we find we have no ſtrength of ourſelves to d any good action, much leſs to accompliſh ſo great work as we have undertaken; and therefore that w

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cast ourselves entirely upon him. It is his work that we are engaged in; and therefore we cannot doubt he will carry us through it. We have no expectancy from ourselves, or any other creature, but depend upon him alone, and his aids from above. It is he, who of his great mercy hath put these good purposes and resolutions into our hearts; and blessed be his name that he hath done so: and now we desire nothing so much in the world, as that we may for ever continue in them. For Christ Jesus sake therefore we beseech him, that he would not forsake us, that he would not withdraw his grace from us, and leave us to ourselves; but that he would continue and improve it, that he would carry on and perfect that good work he hath been pleased already to begin in us.

Oh! my brethren, such breathings of our souls after God as these, are never sent up in vain. They pierce the heavens, and are returned with such gentle showers of grace and influence from above, as will not fail both to refresh our languishing souls, and to enable us to bear such good fruits (if we be not wanting in our endeavours) as shall answer all our own designs, and be acceptable to the great husbandman, who hath sown the good seed in our hearts.

3. But lastly, I have but one thing more to add to what I have said about this business of resolutions, and I have done.—You have, it may be, oftentimes before this, made many solemn resolutions and vows to forsake your sins, particularly such as you have found to be the growing prevailing hindrances of goodness in you, and to enter into a stricter way of living: but you have found that these resolutions have hitherto been ineffectual, and that notwithstanding them, you are still but the same persons that you were before.

That which I have to say in this matter is this: that this ought not to discourage you from trying again. If your good resolutions have not been hitherto successful, it is fit, nay it is necessary, that you should resolve so long, till they be so. Once more therefore, in God's name, enter upon the work; only use more care, and diligence, and consideration in the framing your resolutions, and set yourselves more seriously to the performing of them, and, my life for yours, they will, with the grace of God, prosper in your hands.

But this is not all I meant to say under this head. As none, who have formerly resolved to serve God, and have failed in their undertakings, ought to be discourag'd from making new resolutions to serve him: so none, who are now entring into engagements of that kind, should be discouraged from going on with the work they have engaged in, tho' they now and then, thro' the violence of temptation, or the strength of their corruptions, do act against what they have resolved. The not attending to this, is oftentimes the cause that most excellent beginnings in virtue come to nothing, after we have once or twice broken our purposes, we are apt either to think that all our obligations to them are cancelled, or we think it in vain to pursue them any further; and so we break loose into all the extravagances that our ungoverned appetites and inclinations can prompt us to. But this is the worst reasoning in the world. If we would act like men of sense, when our resolutions are too weak to bridle our appetites, and keep us within bounds, we should rather endeavour to strengthen them, than to cast them quite off. If ever therefore you mean to be so virtuous, so good as you resolve to be, so to serve God as you purpose now to do, it will concern you particularly not t

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be too much diſcouraged or caſt down, if you ſhould now and then fly out into actions, that you have reſolved againſt; but rather to take that occaſion of renewing your vows and reſolutions, and walking more carefully for the future. By this means you will not only not ſuffer by your ſins and frailties, but turn them to your great advantage.

I beſeech you remember this, and I conclude with it; that the greateſt hurt or miſchief that any particular act of ſin can do us, lies not in the guilt that is contracted by it, but in the tendency it has to unhinge our vows and purpoſes, and to make us fall back into a life of careleſſneſs, and ſenſuality, and irreligion. If we can but reſcue ourſelves from theſe ill conſequences of it, and proceed notwithſtanding in our courſe of an holy and virtuous life, the ſin will never be remembred againſt us in the day of judgment; but we ſhall for all that, if we perſevere in our endeavours, find an admittance into the everlaſting kingdom.

SERMON XII.

What is meant by ſetting our affections on heavenly things, and not on earthly: and how abſolutely neceſſary it is, that we ſhould thus rightly place our affections.

COLOS. iii. 2.

Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.

THESE Words, tho' as they lie in the chapter they bear the form of a precept or exhortation, yet we may conſider them as an anſwer to the great enquiry of mankind: a divine reſolution of that important caſe, which every man puts to himſelf. The great end that all mankind purſue, is to be as happy as they can. This we are all agreed upon. But as to the way of attaining this happineſs, or the things in which it doth conſiſt, about theſe we differ. For men finding in themſelves

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appetites and desires of several sorts to be gratified, and necessities of sundry kinds to be supplied, and accordingly there being so many kinds of objects that tend to the gratification of those appetites, and to the supplying those necessities, which present themselves under the notion of goods (as indeed they are) it can scarce be avoided but that men will differ, if not in their opinions, yet in their choice and determination, which of these various appetites they will lay out themselves in the satisfying of; which of those goods they will make it their business to furnish themselves with. And hence it comes to pass, that so many different designs are driven on in the world: and all of them too in order to the same end; that is, the living a happy life. Tho' it is sadly true, that far the greatest number of men do exceedingly fail of their end.

The great concernment then of every man, when he comes to the use of his reason, is to chuse right for himself; to propose such designs to pitch upon, such objects to lay out himself upon, as will not fail to secure to him the great end, *viz.* the being as happy as he can be.

Now all the objects in the world, that can be supposed to recommend themselves to our desires or pursuit, as the things that will make us happy (how many and various soever the particulars be, yet) we shall find, that they may conveniently enough be reduced to two heads; the things of the earth, and, the things above, as the apostle in my text distributes them. So that between these two sorts of things will lie the competition.

By the things of the earth we may understand all sorts of goods that are here about us, that affect our senses, that gratify our animal appetites, that do directly

and immediately tend to the preſervation or well-being of our bodily life, ſuch as riches, pleaſures, honours, knowledge of arts and ſciences, and the like.—By the things above, we underſtand not only the glorious rewards, which we expect after death in the kingdom of heaven, but alſo all thoſe qualities and diſpoſitions of mind, which do prepare us for, and make us capable of thoſe rewards, ſuch as virtue, and goodneſs, and the fear of God.— In a word, by the former we underſtand all thoſe things that do concern our bodies, or our outward man; by the latter, all thoſe things that do concern our ſouls, or our inward man.

Now we do not ſo oppoſe theſe two kinds of things, as to make our purſuit or acquiſition of the one of them incompatible with our purſuit or acquiſition of the other. The queſtion is not whether, in order to our happineſs, we are ſo wholly to attend one, as altogether to neglect the other. No; the things on earth, and the things above, have both the notion of good, and therefore are both deſirable, and therefore may be both laboured after, and may, at leaſt in ſome degree, be attained; and when they are attained, may be enjoyed; and when they are enjoyed, we may take delight and complacency in that enjoyment. But the point lies here; which of theſe, in order to our happineſs, we are to ſet our affections upon: that is to ſay, ſince every man, who doth not live by chance, and is not like a brute, perfectly acted by things without him, doth propoſe to himſelf ſome deſign to purſue, as the great buſineſs of his life, and upon the effecting of which, he takes his happineſs mainly to depend, and what he thus makes his chiefeſt buſineſs, is preferred by him before all other ends, takes up the greateſt ſhare of his thoughts, and labours, and endeavours, while his other projects

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give way to this, and are managed in ſubordination to it. (No man being able to drive on ſeveral different deſigns with the higheſt degree of earneſtneſs and fervor of mind at the ſame time.) And ſince, laſtly, no man can make any thing his main deſign but it will fall under one of theſe two heads, either the things of the earth, or the things above, the great queſtion is, which of theſe two kinds of things are to have the pre-eminence in our choice? Which of them, if we will act like reaſonable men, and conſult our own happineſs and advantage as much as we can, we are to pitch upon, as the main ſtanding buſineſs of our lives, the thing we live for, the thing we will labour after in the firſt place?

This is the great inquiry. And this the apoſtle reſolves in my text, when he adviſeth us to *ſet our affections on the things above, and not on the things on the earth.* The reaſonableneſs of which advice of his, it is the buſineſs of the following diſcourſe to make out.

In order whereunto I ſhall ſhew, that all thoſe motives and arguments, which do uſually prevail with mankind for the determining their choice to this particular thing rather than another, are much ſtronger on the part of the things above, than on the part of the things of the earth. Which, if it be made to appear, the conſequence will be, that that man is a fool, and acts againſt his own intereſt, againſt the common reaſon of mankind, nay, againſt thoſe rules that he himſelf in all other caſes proceeds by, who *ſets his affections on the things of the earth*, and doth not make it the main buſineſs of his life to ſerve God, to get virtuous habits, and by that means to ſecure his ſpiritual and eternal intereſts. Now for the making this good, there needs no more than to lay theſe following things before you:

I. First of all: when two things are proposed to our choice, we use to consider which of them we have most in our power, which of them we are in the likeliest way to attain to if we set about it. Now supposing those things to be equally good, and equally desirable, yet, if we can certainly say of one of them, this good I am sure to make mine own, if I will use my endeavour for the obtaining it, but cannot say the same of the other thing, this alone is enough to determine a considering man to which of those two goods he is to give the preference in his choice. There is no doubt, but, all other things equal, every wise man will reject that which he is uncertain whether he shall obtain or no, and apply himself to that which he is certain he may obtain if he pleases.

Let this now be applied to our present case. Here are, on one hand, the things of the world, *viz.* wealth, honours, pleasures, and abundance of other such things, as tend to make our outward condition easy, and happy, and prosperous; and these do tempt us to lay out ourselves upon them. Here are, on the other hand, virtue and piety, and the eternal happiness that is consequent upon them; and these do likewise invite us to make them our principal aim. We will suppose at this time both these things to be equally good, and equally to recommend themselves to our choice (and thus much at least we may be allowed to suppose.) The question therefore is, to which of these two we will chiefly direct our study and pursuit? I say, if we will be governed by the foregoing rule, we shall of necessity resolve upon these latter, because they are certainly in our power; but the former are not. No man can say before-hand, "I am sure I shall compass such an estate that I aim at, or attain

attain to ſuch preferments which are in my eye, or be ſucceſsful in this or the other deſign of pleaſure that I propoſe to myſelf." But every man in the world may ſay, "I am certain I may be good, if I have a mind. I am certain that I may live righteouſly, and ſoberly, and religiouſly, if I pleaſe. And if I do ſo, I am equally certain that God will take me to his mercy and favour both here and hereafter." And the reaſon is clear; the former things depend upon a hundred accidental circumſtances, none of which are at our command. Abundance of things, which we never dream'd of, come between us and our deſigns of that nature; nay, tho' thoſe deſigns were as well laid, and as carefully managed, as the wit of man can deviſe; and this the experience of the world doth every day make good. But now the other ſort of things; to be temperate, and charitable, and chaſte, and devout, to furniſh our ſouls with all the virtuous habits that will recommend us to God's favour; theſe are not ſubject to ſuch contingencies; they depend only upon ourſelves and the grace of God. No outward agent, no croſs poſture of circumſtances, can defeat our labours and endeavours after them. We may undoubtedly, if we pleaſe, intend them ſincerely, and purſue them induſtriouſly; and, if we do ſo, we may undoubtedly expect the grace of God to further and aſſiſt us; (for he hath ſolemnly promiſed it) and if ſo, what thing is there in the world that can render our deſigns ineffectual?

II. But ſuppoſing the things above and the things on earth were equally in our power, (which you ſee they are not:) ſuppoſing that every man may be as certain in ſucceeding in all his worldly deſigns, as in thoſe relating to his ſoul; yet which of theſe will re-

quire the greater pains? Which of these ends can be serv'd with most ease, and with the least difficulty? This is another thing, which, when two designs, different from each other, are proposed to us, we usually enquire after, before we fix upon either. And surely, if the difference between them lies in nothing else but this, all the world will agree, that that good, which is most easily come by, is to be preferr'd before that which cannot be had without more pains and difficulty. Now let us examine, whether upon this account, as well as the former, the goods of our souls do not much more recommend themselves to our choice and pursuit, than those of the body. And for the adjusting of this, we need only ask these questions: Which of the two will require more skill and application of mind? Which of the two will engage us in more labour and toil of body? And which of the two will take up more of our time for the compassing of them?

1. Now as to the degree of skill required to the successful prosecution of the one or the other, there is no comparison between them. Virtue and goodness, every body knows, are simple things, and the way to them lies plain and even before us. There needs no great depth of parts, no shrewdness and subtlety of understanding, no curious plots and contrivances for the attaining of them. Every one hath skill enough to be virtuous, if he bring but a good will to it: nor is any man ever at a loss what course to take, what methods to follow, for the bringing about his purpose. In this case, honesty and sincerity of heart is all that is required. But it is quite otherwise with our worldly designs; for the compassing them there is need of a great deal of art. Every

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man is not presently fit to go about them. Abundance of cunning is required to the dextrous management of them. A man must bend his brains to them, as well as his inclinations. He must study, and think, and contrive, and toss things in his head a hundred ways, and all this little enough for the putting his business into any forwardness. Nay, and oftentimes when he hath done all this, he will stick in the briers, and be at a loss which way to go on. Nor is it thus only with the greater and more difficult designs of human life, such as the attainment of power, and dignity, and riches, but almost every petty project that a man busies himself about. As the things of the world go, the managing of a very trivial business, or the prosecuting some very inconsiderable design, doth sufficiently exercise a man's wit and invention, and he finds difficulty enough in going thro' it. So that in this respect the things above have certainly the advantage of the things on the earth, *viz.* in point of easiness of acquisition.

2. But this is not all. Let us see next, whether of the two will engage a man in more action, and labour, and toil for the obtaining of them. But neither will this bear any dispute. For there are none, who understand any thing of the world, but must be sensible what a deal of pains a man must take, who means to thrive in his calling; or who proposeth to be rich, or who intends to get together a great stock of learning or knowledge, or who resolves indeed successfully to prosecute any design of pleasure, or ambition, or the like. How much rest must he lose! What a bustle and hurry is he almost continually in! What drudgery and labour is he exposed to! What uneasy, unagreeable tasks is he frequently forced to undergo!

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And he feels the effects of all this in the wearineſs and conſumption of ſpirits, which his over-harraſſing himſelf doth frequently bring upon him.—But now there is none of this fatigue, none of this tugging and turmoil in purſuing the deſigns of virtue. There the more ſtill, and quiet, and compoſed a man is, the better is his work likely to go on. No action of religion doth engage a man in any hard toil or labour, or diſturb his reſt, or put him to the inconveniences of wearineſs or ill hours. The truth is, virtuous habits are not ſo much attained by action and labour, as by ſuſpending our action, and ceaſing from labour: and it is vice only, or our worldly concerns, that puts us upon taking pains. As for inſtance; would I be temperate? I have nothing to do but to ceaſe eating and drinking when nature is ſatisfied; but to be intemperate, engages me to take pains in the oppreſſing my ſtomach with loads of meat and drink. Would a man be chaſte and pure? He hath nothing to do but to ſit ſtill, and to keep his thoughts at home. But to manage an intrigue of luſt, deſtroys his eaſe and peace, and puts him upon many toils and difficulties. Would a man exerciſe meekneſs and patience? It is done by ſaying or doing nothing when he is provoked. But to be angry and revengeful, ſets all the powers of his ſoul and body in a hurry and agitation, and a man takes a great deal of pains to trouble and torment himſelf. This great advantage there is in the purſuit of the ways of virtue, and the happineſs of the other world, which neither any vicious, no, nor any worldly deſigns, can pretend to have.

3. But if it be ſtill a queſtion whether the things of the earth, or the things above, are to be come by moſt eaſily, and with the leaſt difficulty, let it be further

ther conſidered, whether of them do take up more of our time for the compaſſing of them. If it appears that things temporal neceſſarily do ſo, then it will be no longer a queſtion; for it is plain, in point of eaſineſs, that the advantage will lie on the part of things ſpiritual. Now that they do ſo cannot be doubted by any one, who conſiders that the purſuit of our worldly deſigns (if we mean to be ſucceſsful in them to that degree we uſually propoſe to ourſelves) doth, and always will employ much the greateſt part of our lives. Who can hope to be rich, or great, or learned, or ſerve any other conſiderable ſecular end, but he muſt, in a manner, be obliged wholly to attend upon that very thing? Nay, a great many are forced to be ſuch ſlaves to their buſineſs, and to their deſigns, that they can ſcarce allow themſelves leiſure to take the ordinary refreſhments of nature, *riſing up early, and taking reſt late, and continually eating the bread of carefulneſs*, as the pſalmiſt expreſſes it, Pſ. cxxvii. 3. And this too, many a time, for the getting them a very ordinary livelihood: whereas the buſineſs of religion doth not thus enſlave us. Nay, ſo far from that, a moderate portion of our daily time, duly ſet apart, and carefully employed, will not fail, with the grace of God, to ſecure to us all the intereſts of our ſouls, both in this world and that which is to come. Even thoſe hours, which a great many men may well ſpare from their buſineſs, and that time which lies upon the hands of others, and which they ſpend either impertinently or viciouſly: I ſay, was this well huſbanded to the purpoſes of virtue, it would make a man everlaſtingly happy. So little doth religion enthral mankind, or the offices of it devour their time.

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All theſe things now conſidered, we cannot but be fully convinced, that as the things above, the concernments of our ſouls, virtue and goodneſs, and eternal ſalvation, are much more certain to be attained, if we labour after them, than the things of this world; ſo are they alſo to be attained with a great deal leſs trouble and difficulty. And therefore, ſuppoſing them to be but equally good, and equally deſirable with the other, we muſt act againſt the common notion and practice of mankind, if we do not rather ſet our affection and fix our deſigns upon them, than upon the things on the earth. And this is the ſecond thing I had to offer upon this argument.

III. But thirdly, we have hitherto put the things above and the things on the earth upon the ſame level, as to their intrinſic value. We have hitherto ſuppoſed them to be both equally good, and equally deſirable. But I deſire it may be conſidered, that this is by no means a fair ſuppoſition. There is a vaſt difference between the goodneſs of the one and of the other. The one are always good; the other only contingently ſo. The one always promote our happineſs; the other often prove evil and miſchievous to us. There is no man can ſay before-hand, of any temporal deſign that he drives on, that he ſhall certainly be the better, if he ſucceeds in it: for it may, and often doth happen, that he is the worſe. But, on the contrary, we may always ſay truly of ſpiritual things, the more of them that we purchaſe to ourſelves, the better and the happier we are.

Piety, virtue and goodneſs, are things deſirable for themſelves. They can never come amiſs to any man. He who hath them, ſhall never be a loſer by them, will never repent that he laid out his pains and ſtudy

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in the acquisition of them. They recommend themselves to the reason and understanding of mankind; and no peculiarity of temper, no posture of affairs, no outward condition, can render them useless to us. Nay, whatever our external circumstances be, we shall always receive great benefit and advantage from them. The more piously we live, the more we love God, and do good in the world; the more temperate, and humble, and charitable we are, still the more happy and the better pleased we find ourselves to be, whatever change there happens in our outward condition and circumstances of life.

But it is often quite otherwise with the other sort of things. They are not good, but in certain cases. They are not valuable for themselves, but for other ends and purposes, which they serve to. And there must be the concurrence of abundance of contingent circumstances to make them fit, or convenient, or useful to us. Take those of them that make the greatest noise and shew in the world; those of them that are generally accounted the most desirable, most courted by mankind, (such as greatness, honour and power, and the affluence of all things, that make either for pomp or pleasure) doth not the experience of the world make good, that after a man hath spent a great deal of time and pains in the pursuit of them, and, with much ado, has obtained what his heart desired, yet they generally come very much short of his expectation? Nay, where he once finds in them the good that he promised himself, he ten times fails of it: nay, he not only finds his expectations defeated, but, to his cost, he sees, that the things which looked very lovely and charming before he had them, after he is in possession of them, appear quite with another face.

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He finds they are so far from contributing to the bettering of his condition, that they render it worse. That good which all the world admired and cried up, and he, upon the noise, was so alarmed, that he was resolved to have it, whatever it cost him. Now that he has it, he feels that he is more uneasy than he was before. It either suits not with his temper, or it involves him in a multitude of cares and anxieties, of troubles and vexations, which before he was unacquainted with, and which render his life miserable. Or, lastly, it engages him in such follies, and vices, and debaucheries, as perhaps, had he been in another condition, he had never been guilty of, and which at last end in his ruin and destruction. Thus it is often with the secular designs we pursue. Tho' the things we labour after appear very convenient and desirable at a distance, yet, alas! we know not but that the next moment after we possess them, we shall be heartily weary of them, and repent that we spent so much pains about them. Only virtuous habits, and a pure conscience, no man ever found a burden to him. No man ever grudged the pains he took about them. No man ever found them unfit for his circumstances, or wished to be rid of them.

IV. But, fourthly, when we compare two goods, in order to our chusing which of them we should apply ourselves to, we do not only examine which of them is really best for us, but also which of them is the most durable good; which of them is most in our power to keep after we are possessed of it. No man will lay out as much cost on an estate whose title may be called in question, and of which he may be dispossessed in a little time, as he would upon that which he is morally sure is indisputably good to him and his heirs; nay, tho' the estate whose title is litigable was much better at present

ſent than the other. In this caſe nature would have its courſe. The man who is concerned would undoubtedly ſay, give me a certainty, tho' it be little, rather than an uncertain eſtate, tho' of much greater value. Now why ſhould we not reaſon thus in the great debate between the concernments of our ſouls and bodies, as we do in every petty purchaſe we make? If we would, I dare ſay, it would be no conjecture on which ſide the victory would remain. Let us ſuppoſe again (which yet you ſee is not true) that thoſe worldly deſigns we propoſe to ourſelves, will, if we can accompliſh them, really prove advantageous to us, and anſwer all our expectations: and we can ſay no more of the things of the Spirit. Let them therefore once again, as to this point, be equal, yet whether of them can we beſt ſecure to ourſelves for futurity? Alas! there is no man, that knows the world, but muſt needs acknowledge, that all things in it are variable and uncertain: are ours to-day, and gone to-morrow. There is no temporal good whatſoever, that a man can truly call his own, there being an hundred contingencies that may the next moment deprive him of it. But it is not thus with ſpiritual things. They are out of the reach of fortune. They are not obnoxious, either to decays, or caſualties, or to the violence of others. It is not in the power of the whole world to take them from us, after we are once poſſeſſed of them. A thief may rob me of my money, but he cannot ſteal my virtue from me. I may, by a turn of ſtate, loſe my greatneſs, or my preferments, and become low and deſpiſed; but the worſt of my enemies cannot deſtroy the peace and content of my mind, which ariſes from the reflection upon my good actions, and the hopes of a happy life after this. Sickneſs or age may make me loſe the comelineſs of my perſon,

ſon, but they can never alter the complexion of my mind. A war or a peſtilence may divorce me from my wife and children, from my deareſt friends or relations, but they can never ſeparate me from my patience and courage, from the love of my God and my acquieſcence in his providence, and the hopes of his favour in another world. Since therefore the matter clearly ſtands thus, as to things ſpiritual and things temporal, let all the world judge whether of theſe a man in reaſon ought to ſet his affections on. Whether it be not extremely abſurd to *labour* more *for the meat that periſheth*, than for that *which endureth to life everlaſting*, John vi. 27. *To lay up to ourſelves treaſure upon earth, where moth and ruſt doth corrupt*, and *where thieves break thro' and ſteal*, without being ſollicitous of *laying up to ourſelves treaſures in heaven*, Matt. vi. 19. 20. which are not ſubject to any of theſe inconveniencies.

V. But, fifthly, let it be conſidered, that the things above, that is to ſay, thoſe accompliſhments which recommend us to God, and make us capable of the rewards of the other world, as they are more durable, more permanent than the things on the earth; ſo alſo are they, in their own nature, more noble and excellent. (For all outward good doth but gratify ſome of our bodily ſenſes.) How much ſoever they may be eſteemed by mankind, yet they ſerve no higher end, than the yielding ſatisfaction to thoſe appetites which are common with us to brute creatures. There is not a beaſt of the field but hath the ſame enjoyments, and the ſame pleaſures that any worldly man receives from thoſe ſenſible things which he buſies himſelf about. For the ſum of all his labours and endeavours comes but to this, that he be put into good outward circumſtances; that he be in ſuch a condition, that all his ſenſes may

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be gratified; that he may eat and drink well; that he may have variety of ſenſual pleaſures; and that he may be free from the fears of want, both as to himſelf and his children. And do not the brutes enjoy themſelves as much as ſuch a man in all theſe reſpects? Have not they all theſe ſatisfactions? There is no doubt of it. If there be any queſtion about this, it is, whether they have not theſe enjoyments in greater perfection, than worldly, vicious men have. For the beaſts are free from all thoſe anxieties, and fears, and uncomfortable reflexions, which oftentimes grate upon the minds of ſuch men, even in the midſt of their beſt and higheſt animal gratifications. But now theſe goods that are of a ſpiritual nature, do gratify the intellectual appetites of mankind. They are the proper objects of thoſe powers and faculties whereby mankind are diſtinguiſhed from brutes. They are ſuch kind of goods, as men (as they are men) can only be pleaſed with.

What is it that we have above brutes, but theſe two things, the power of reaſon, and the ſenſe of religion? Now how are theſe two faculties perfected? What are the adequate objects of them? Doth not the perfection of our reaſon conſiſt in employing our underſtandings about the beſt objects, and uſing our liberty in the beſt way? Do we not then act moſt reaſonably, when we propoſe to ourſelves the worthieſt ends, and ſteadily purſue thoſe means which lead to thoſe ends, and when we keep all our inferior appetites, common to us with the brutes, under due regulation and government? But what is all this but another name for virtue? And further, what is it that that ſenſe of religion, which nature hath endowed us with above brute creatures, doth put us upon? In what way is that to be exerciſed? Doth it not conſiſt in performing acts of worſhip, and praiſe,

and adoration to the Supreme Being, in acknowledging, in loving, in depending upon him, who gives us whatever we enjoy, and having a conſtant ſenſe of his preſence, and power, and goodneſs? So that to employ ourſelves in theſe kinds of things, to ſtudy them, to be daily converſant in them, to make them the buſineſs of our lives, is the only evidence we can give that we live like men: that we look upon ourſelves as placed in a higher rank of beings, than the beaſts: that we put our rational natures to that uſe, that by their very make and conſtitution they were deſigned to be put to. And however it be, that the pleaſure and ſatisfaction which ariſe from theſe things, *viz.* virtue and religion, do not make ſo great a noiſe, nay, perhaps, may ſeem very flat and inſipid to thoſe who are unacquainted with them; yet, I am certain, there is none, who hath ever made tryal of them, but is abundantly convinced that they far tranſcend all the gratifications of ſenſe in the world. That to ſerve God, and to keep a good conſcience, and to govern our paſſions, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly, yields infinitely more peace, and pleaſure, and ſatisfaction to a man's mind, than the happieſt outward condition, the moſt proſperous ſucceſſes of our worldly deſigns. And indeed, in the reaſon of the thing, it muſt be thus: foraſmuch as the higher and nobler the faculties are, ſo much the more exquiſitely delightful muſt be their ſatisfaction. So many degrees therefore as reaſon and underſtanding are above ſenſe, ſo many degrees proportionably muſt virtue and goodneſs, which are their proper objects, exceed all ſenſible enjoyments.

And thus much of the fifth conſideration. The ſum of what I have hitherto ſaid, comes to this, that if either you will chuſe a certainty, before an uncertainty;

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or that which is eaſy to be come by, before that which is difficult; or that which is really and indiſputably good, good at all times, and in all circumſtances, before that which it is doubtful whether it be good or no; or that good which you can call your own, before that which is at the mercy of a thouſand accidents every day; or, laſtly, that good, which is the higheſt and nobleſt which our natures are capable of, before that which is mean and low, and which the beaſts of the field have as much a ſhare in as mankind: I ſay, if you will proceed in your choice by any of theſe meaſures, then we muſt certainly prevail upon you to follow St. Paul's advice in the text, you muſt ſet your *affection on the things above, and not on the things on the earth.*

But to convince you further of the abſolute neceſſity of ſo doing, if you have any regard to your own intereſts, there are two conſiderations more to be laid before you, which are of greater weight than all that has been hitherto repreſented; tho' I can but juſt name them to you, not having now time left to enlarge upon them.

VI. When the competition lies between two things, which of them we ſhould afford the uppermoſt place in our eſteem and affection, and the greateſt ſhare of our care and pains for the acquiſition of them, and it is made apparent to us that the one of them is ſo abſolutely neceſſary to our happineſs in this world, that, if we have it not, we ſhall neceſſarily be miſerable; but the other doth ſo little contribute to our happineſs, that we may do very well without it, at leaſt we may do very well with ſuch a ſhare of it, as we may certainly promiſe to ourſelves, if we do take care to ſecure the other: I ſay, in this caſe, who can avoid the preferring the former,

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and pitching upon it for our main end, rather than the latter. And yet truly thus ſtands the caſe between *the things of the earth*, and *the things above*. Spiritual things, *viz.* virtue and piety, and the like, are ſuch goods, that without them it is impoſſible for a man to be tolerably happy in this world, let his other circumſtances be never ſo proſperous. Tho' a man had ſucceſs in all his temporal deſigns, even according to his own heart's deſire; tho' he was poſſeſſed of every good that this world can afford him; yet ſuch is the frame of human nature, and ſuch likewiſe is the conſtitution of things in this world, that for all this the man would not be eaſy; nay, as to many periods of his life, he would be very miſerable, if devoid of virtue and goodneſs, and the fear of God: whereas on the other ſide, whoever is poſſeſſed of theſe, whoever is truly good, and makes it his main buſineſs to ſerve and to pleaſe God, ſuch a man, for the moſt part, enjoys as much happineſs as the world can give: however, he can never be miſerable, let things happen to him as they will. If it pleaſe God to beſtow upon him the common outward comforts and conveniencies of life (as of all others ſuch a man moſt rarely miſſes of them, God having promiſed, that if we firſt *ſeek his kingdom and the righteouſneſs thereof, all other things ſhall be added unto us.*) Why, in this caſe, the man wants nothing to make him compleatly happy, as far as this ſtate will allow of. But if he ſhould be deſtitute even of theſe common comforts we ſpeak of, and God ſhould think fit to exerciſe him with many croſſes and afflictions, yet even in this caſe the man would be far from being miſerable; he hath that within him which will for ever ſupport him under all trials of this nature. And this is the ſum of my ſixth conſideration, which indeed deſerves a juſt diſcourſe

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by itself, in order to its being put into a clear light. But,

VII. Lastly, to conclude all. What I have hitherto said, has been to shew, that if we aimed at no more than our present well-being in this life, it would be absolutely necessary that we should *set our affections on the things above, and not on the things on the earth.* But there is still a much weightier argument to persuade us to this; and such a one, as if all the rest signified nothing, would have force enough of itself to do it; nay, such force, as no man, in his wits, can resist. And that, in plain English is this: if we set our affections on the things of the earth, how much pleasure or advantage soever we may promise to ourselves from them in this world, yet when we come to die, we shall not be a whit the better for them: nay, so far from that, that we are lost, and undone, and miserable to eternity, if we have not taken care to secure to ourselves those spiritual treasures I have been all along speaking of. Whereas on the contrary, if we *set our affections on the things above*, how slender a provision soever we have made to ourselves of worldly goods, yet by thus pitching our designs, we purchase to ourselves *an everlasting inheritance in the heavens*; *a crown of glory that fadeth not away*, 1 Pet. v. 4. The perpetual enjoyment of such pleasures and rewards, *as no tongue can utter, nor the mind of man conceive of*, 1 Cor ii. 9.

There need no words to set off this argument. The plain state of the matter is this. God sets before us *the things of this earth, and the things above.* The one, as the apostle tells us, *are temporal*, the *other eternal*, 2 Cor. iv. 18. The one are for serving the turns of this present life, which is but of a short continuance; the other last as long as our souls, that is, for ever.

The former are indeed present to us, and do more strongly affect those powers in us, which in this corrupt state we are generally led by; but yet the end of them is everlasting damnation in hell fire, with the devil and his angels, supposing we have set our hearts upon them to the neglect of the other. The latter are indeed at a distance, and we are not apt to have so vivid a sense of them: but yet if we set our hearts upon them, if we make the purchase of them our principal care and pursuit, they will not leave us, either in this world or the other, but will secure to us the eternal salvation both of our souls and bodies in the kingdom of heaven. And all this is true, or else all religion is false.

This now being the true state of the case between spiritual things and temporal, between *the things on the earth and the things above*, let every one, who has common sense, judge which of them he ought to set his affections on, and lay out himself about.

I pray God to give us all grace to act in this our great concernment as reasonable men should. If we do so, happy are we. Happy, no doubt, in a good degree, even while we live in this world, but unspeakably happy when we leave it. For then *an entrance shall be administred unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus*, 1 Pet. i. 11. where, with all the holy angels of God, and all *the spirits of just men made perfect*, Heb. xii. 23. we shall for ever live in perfect peace and joy, and sing everlasting praises to him, who made us, and redeemed us, and hath *done more abundantly for us, than we could ask or think*, Eph. iii. 20.

To whom be all honour and glory, henceforth and for ever.

SER-

SERMON XIII.

A vindication of the juſt and innocent uſe of ſpeech, from ſome ſcruples which have been raiſed from two or three particular texts.

EPHES. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the uſe of edifying, that it may miniſter grace to the hearers.

WHAT is it that St. Paul here means by *corrupt communication?* Why certainly his deſign was to caution chriſtians againſt all filthineſs, and immodeſty, and laſciviouſneſs in their diſcourſes. But tho' all impure and obſcene ſpeeches be more eſpecially a *corrupt converſation*, and what, I believe, was chiefly meant in this text, yet we may, if we pleaſe, extend the prohibition ſo, as to take into it all other ſorts of ſpeeches that are againſt good manners, and contrary to the laws of the goſpel.

Thus far we do readily grant the prohibition may be extended. But this will not ſatisfy ſome perſons; for they are for carrying it much farther. There are ſome, who do not think it enough that men ſhould abſtain from all ſorts of ſpeeches or communication that is contrary to good manners, but they think likewiſe, that every chriſtian is obliged to take care, that all his words, all his converſation with others, ſhould be ſo ordered as to have ſomething in it that tends to the promoting of religion; ſomething that makes for the ſpiritual edification of thoſe to whom he ſpeaks. And whatever ſpeeches or diſcourſes are uſed in converſation, that are not of this nature, they account to be corrupt communication. And this they gather from the words of the text, *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the uſe of edifying, that it may miniſter grace to the hearers.*

And there are two other texts in the New-teſtament, which ſeem to favour this notion of theirs. One is, that paſſage of our Saviour's, where he ſays, *That every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give an account thereof at the day of judgment*, Mat. xii. 36. Now what is an idle word, but ſuch a word as is unprofitable? Such a word as doth not miniſter to edification? The other text is that of St. Paul, where he condemns not only *all filthineſs* in our communication, but alſo *all fooliſh talking and jeſting, as things which are not convenient*, Eph. v. 4. So that not only idle and unprofitable words, but alſo all ſorts of joking and jeſting are forbidden by the apoſtle. Now we all know what jeſting means. It is the ſpeaking things, by way of mirth and drollery, for the entertainment and diverſion of the company. So that according

according to theſe peoples interpretation of St. Paul, we are never in converſation to ſpeak any thing but what is grave and ſerious. And every thing that miniſters only to mirth and pleaſantneſs, tho' it be otherwiſe never ſo innocent, is inconvenient, as the apoſtle ſtiles it, that is, not to be practiſed by any chriſtian.

This is the full of what is objected by the niceſt and moſt ſcrupulous ſort of perſons, againſt the common converſation of the world. And I muſt confeſs, theſe three texts I have named, do, at the firſt hearing, appear wonderfully ſtrict and ſevere, and ſeem to carry that ſenſe which hath been now repreſented. And I do believe there are ſeveral honeſt and ſerious chriſtians among us, who, taking them in this ſenſe, are uneaſy in their own minds, and do daily accuſe themſelves as offenders, becauſe their talk and diſcourſes do not come up to that ſtrictneſs which they fanſy is enjoined by theſe paſſages.

My preſent deſign therefore is to vindicate the juſt and innocent liberty which God hath allowed us in the uſe of our tongues, by giving an account of theſe three texts, which, as ſome people expound them, do really invade it.

But withal, I ſhall take care to enforce the practice of that which the text I am now upon, in the true ſenſe of it, doth recommend to us. And this is the other thing I propoſe to do in treating on this argument.

I. But before I come to a particular examination of theſe texts, I muſt premiſe theſe two things.

1. That it is a great preſumption againſt the interpretation of theſe texts, in that ſtrict ſenſe we have mentioned, that if ſuch an interpretation be admitted, it will deſtroy ſome of the great uſes and advantages

of ſpeech among mankind. For the benefit of ſpeech was given us not only to help and forward one another in the way that leads to eternal life, (which muſt indeed be confeſſed is the great end of all) but it was given us alſo for the helping and forwarding one another in all the buſineſſes which are of a ſecular concernment. Our ſpeech was given us for the ſame purpoſes that all other worldly bleſſings, and talents, and endowments are, *viz.* not only for the buſineſs of religion, but alſo for the ſerving all the other deſigns we have in the world, that tend to the making our own lives, or the lives of others, eaſy, and convenient, and comfortable; as for inſtance, for the maintaining of commerce and correſpondence one with another in matters of trade; for the managing all our civil concernments to the beſt advantage; for the endearing ourſelves to one another by mutal friendſhip and acquaintance, and the payment of mutual reſpects and civilities; and, in purſuance of this, for the diverting our friends and acquaintance, and the making each other's condition as pleaſant and agreeable as we may. And in truth, I account that chearful and diverting talk, (provided it be innocent) is as neceſſary to keep both ourſelves, and thoſe we converſe with, in health and good humour, and in a fitneſs to perform all the duties of human life, whether they reſpect God, or our neighbour, as any other exerciſe or recreation in the world. And if this liberty of talking pleaſantly (tho' not always to edification) be denied to mankind, and all men thought ſo, and practiſed accordingly; the world in a little time, inſtead of being a place of human ſociety, would be turned into a den of mopes and hypochondriacs.

chondriacs. This is the first presumption against the strict way of interpreting these texts.

2. But there is another thing that doth as much make against it; *viz.* That really, according to these interpretations, the texts are not practicable. Devout people may fansy what they please about all our speeches tending to edification; but in truth it is all speculation. I never yet knew or heard of any persons (who were not under the disorders of hypochondriac melancholy) so grave or serious, or severe in their conversation, but, upon occasion, have allowed themselves the liberty of talking an hundred things, which would not comport with the strictness of this rule. So that even the devoutest of men should not interpret these texts of scripture to the sense beforementioned, and should not make this interpretation the rule of their words and discourses. They must, I doubt, every night go to rest with a troubled and uneasy conscience, for the communication they have had that day, as necessarily believing that they have that day offended God in their discourses. There is indeed the example of our Lord Jesus urged against this; of whom we read in scripture, that he several times wept; but it is not recorded there that he ever laughed. But if you will well attend to it, there is no great force in this. Doth it therefore follow, that because no mention is made of our Saviour's laughing, that therefore he never laughed? We may, by the same logic, conclude, that he never went to bed, because we find no mention of it in the holy scriptures. But in truth, from the character that is given of our Saviour in scripture, one would rather believe the contrary to this was true, and that he was not so sullen and morose a person, as this objection would

repreſent him; but rather that he was a man of great benignity, and pleaſantneſs, and ſociableneſs in his converſation, witneſs his frequent vouchſafing his preſence at feaſts and etertainments; inſomuch, as he himſelf tells us, that whereas John the baptiſt was accuſed to *have a devil* (that is, to be a diſturbed hypochondriac) upon account of his reſervedneſs, he, our Saviour, went under the character of *a glutton or a wine-bibber*, (Matt. xi. 18, 19.) upon account of the freedom of his converſation.

Having premiſed theſe two things, I now come to conſider the texts themſelves; and I ſhall give an account of them one by one.

Firſt, And I begin with that of our Saviour's in Matt. xii. 36. *I ſay unto you, that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give account thereof in the day of judgment.* The difficulty here is to know what our Lord means by *idle words*. We commonly think, as I ſaid, every unprofitable word, that doth not tend to ſome ſerious purpoſe, is an *idle word*. But I believe, upon examination, it will be found, that the ἀργὸν ῥῆμα, *the idle word* here ſpoken of, hath a quite different ſenſe. The true way to know our Saviour's meaning, is to look back to what goes before, to attend to the occaſion upon which he ſpoke theſe words, and the ſcope and deſign he had in ſpeaking of them. Now it is plain, that our Saviour is here treating about that which we commonly call the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. The phariſees had ſaid, *This fellow doth not caſt out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils*, verſe 24. Our Saviour takes notice of this ſaying of theirs, and firſt of all, by clear arguments and demonſtrations, ſhews, that this was a mere calumny, a mere ſlander of theirs. And that it was impoſſible,

impoſſible, all things conſider'd, that he ſhould caſt out devils, and do his other miracles by any other power than the Spirit of God. And this is the effect of all his diſcourſe in the next ſix verſes, *viz.* from the 24th to the 31ſt. He then comes, in the ſecond place, to declare againſt the greatneſs and danger of the ſin they were guilty of, in thus maliciouſly traducing his miracles, and ſaying that he did them by the power of the devil. And this he doth in the two next verſes, *I ſay unto you, that all manner of ſin and blaſphemy* (*viz.* all manner of calumny and ſlander) *ſhall be forgiven unto men, but the blaſphemy* (the calumny and ſlander) *againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men*, verſe 31. Further, *Whoſoever*, ſays he, *ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of Man* (that is, againſt Jeſus Chriſt, as to his perſonal qualifications, as for inſtance, calling him a glutton or a wine-bibber) *it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt* (*viz.* whoſoever blaſphemes the miracles that I do by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, and attributes them to the devil, this blaſphemy and calumny is of ſo high a nature, that) *it ſhall never be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the other*, verſe 32. After this he goes on in the three next verſes, further to vindicate his miracles from thoſe aſperſions, and to declare againſt their horrible hypocriſy in thus ſlandering them. And then in the next verſe come in theſe words I am now ſpeaking of, *But I ſay unto you, that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give account thereof in the day of judgment.* Thus come in the words, upon this occaſion, and in purſuance of the former diſcourſe. I will now appeal to any one, who knows any thing of the laws of diſcourſe, whether it be not

plain, that our Saviour in this expreſſion of his, of giving account at the day of judgment for *idle words*, hath not reference to ſuch kind of words, as he had all this while been talking of; *viz.* ſuch words as the phariſees ſpoke, when they ſaid *that he caſt out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils.* Certainly this is as evident from the connexion of one part of our Saviour's diſcourſe with the reſt, as any thing can be. And if we will not make our Saviour to ſpeak inconſiſtently, and to talk againſt the rules of talking, we muſt acknowledge, that the words which he here calls *idle words*, muſt be ſuch falſe, malicious, ſlanderous words, as he hath all this time been reproving the phariſees for.

Well; but it will be ſaid, that this account of the text doth indeed ſuit very well with the occaſion, and with the context; but yet it ſeems not to ſuit with the terms here uſed. Our Saviour doth not ſay, that for every ſlander or calumny that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give account, but for *every idle word they ſhall ſpeak.* To this I anſwer, that if the ſenſe of *idle words*, in the language that our Saviour ſpoke, muſt neceſſarily have been the ſame with the ſenſe of *idle words* in our language, this would be a conſiderable objection. But it is plain it is not ſo. *Idle words* in the Jewiſh language, do often import a great deal more than uſeleſs and unprofitable words, *viz.* falſe and lying words. To give a few inſtances of this: we are forbid in the third commandment, *to take the name of God idly, or in vain*, Exod. xx. 7. (for it is indifferent which of theſe ways we render the Hebrew word) But now the ſenſe of that (as our Saviour himſelf expounds it) is, thou ſhalt not take God's name into thy mouth falſely, *thou ſhalt not forſwear*

thyſelf. And thus in the book of Proverbs, *idle words* are made to be the ſame thing with lying words. And thus likewiſe in the epiſtle to the Epheſians, chap. v. ver. 6. *Let no man deceive you with vain or idle words.* The plain ſenſe is, Let no man deceive you with falſe or lying words. And thus in the Old-teſtament, where the gods of the heathens are called vain or idle gods, the ſenſe is, that they are falſe gods. So that in the very nature of the expreſſion, a great deal more may be imported in the term of *idle words*, than barely uſeleſs, unprofitable, unedifying words. And where the ſcope and deſign of the diſcourſe carries it to more (as it doth plainly here) more undoubtedly is to be underſtood by that term. The ſum of this point is this, the *idle words* which we ſhall give account for, are falſe and ſlanderous words; or, if you will, any ſort of words which ſavour of a corrupt communication, any words that violate the laws of morality: but by no means ſuch words as are innocent, and in which no harm is meant, and by which no harm is done; tho' perhaps they do not ſerve to any great purpoſe either of ſpiritual or temporal improvement or advantage. And thus much let it ſuffice to have ſpoken of the firſt text.

Secondly, The next I will give an account of, is that of St. Paul, Eph. v. 4. He, in the verſe before, having exhorted the *Epheſians*, *that fornication and all uncleanneſs might not ſo much as be named among them, as becometh ſaints*, adds in this verſe, *neither filthineſs, nor fooliſh talking or jeſting.* Here now ſeems to be a terrible check and rebuke given to all that we call mirth, or wit, or railery, or good humour in converſation; for all that comes under the notion of jeſting, as we uſe the word. So that if jeſting is forbidden, God forgive moſt of the converſation of this world, tho' otherwiſe

wiſe never ſo innocent. But I think I need ſay no more to convince you, that this is not the true meaning of the text, than only to give you Dr. Hammond's account of it, who was indeed himſelf one of the graveſt ſevereſt men that perhaps his age bred. He takes notice that μωρολογία and ἐυτραπελία (which are the words here uſed, and which we render fooliſh talking and jeſting) are in this place ſo joined together, that the latter word is only an explanation of the former. For the apoſtle, ſpeaking of ſeveral other things that are not to be named among chriſtians, mentions, among the reſt, fooliſh talking *or* jeſting. He doth not ſay fooliſh talking *and* jeſting, which would make them two diſtinct things; but fooliſh talking *or* jeſting, which makes the latter word only an explication of that which goes before. He obſerves likewiſe further, that μωρολογία, which we render fooliſh talking, (but if ſtrictly interpreted, would ſignify ſpeaking folly) is, in the language of ſcripture, ſuch kind of talking, as tends to lewdneſs and uncleanneſs; as to commit folly in the ſacred language is the ſame thing as to commit fornication or adultery. And conſequently the latter word, jeſting, means the ſame thing, only with this difference, that μωρολογία is ſpeaking lewdly in general, but ἐυτραπελία, or jeſting, is ſpeaking lewdly, by way of jeſt, with a deſign to move laughter, for that is the importance of the word. He therefore concludes, that both theſe words, fooliſh talking and jeſting, are not to be taken in the full latitude that they ſignify in our language, but are to be confined to ſuch kind of talk or diſcourſe, as is impure, and ſmutty, and obſcene. And this concluſion of his he confirms from two things: firſt, from the company that theſe are ſet with, *viz.* uncleanneſs, fornication, inordinate luſt, (which

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is more proper than covetousness *) and filthiness, which are named immediately before. And secondly, and more especially, from the reason that is given, why these things should not be named among christians in the words following, ; and that is this: *For this you know*, says the apostle, ver. 5. *that no whoremonger, or unclean person, or inordinate luster* †, *who is an idolater* (for so the words are more intelligibly rendered than by *covetous man, who is an idolater) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* Here is a reason given why none of those things before mentioned should be named among christians. It follows therefore, that foolish talking and jesting, which are one of the things mentioned, must be of the same sort with the rest of the things, *viz.* must fall under some head of uncleanness, otherwise the reason here given would not reach them, and consequently would not answer to the exhortation. I think this is a very plain account of this passage, and that there needs no more to be said about it.

Thirdly, Well, but the difficulty about the liberty of speech is not yet over. However we get off from this text, yet what can be said to the other passage of St. Paul, which I have at present made my text. The apostle, in this place, doth not only caution us, that *no corrupt communication should proceed out of our mouths*, but he also exhorts, that we should in all our conversation *speak that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*

What is meant by this? Is it not plain from hence, that no words ought to pass our lips but such as tend to edification, such as minister grace to the hearers? Well, this text I shall now, in the last place consider.

1*st.*

* πλεονεξία, vid. *Hammond*'s note on *Rom* i. 29. † πλεονέκτης.

1*ſt*. And firſt of all I deſire it may be taken notice of, that let the ſenſe of theſe words be what it will, yet they are always to be underſtood with this proviſo, *viz*. ſuppoſing we have ability, and convenience, and opportunity. A man cannot always ſpeak that which tends *to the uſe of edifying*. For in many caſes perhaps it is above his reach. But if he could, oftentimes the nature of the converſation, or the circumſtances of the company, would not bear it. In either of theſe caſes now I hope a man doth not tranſgreſs the apoſtle's rule, when he doth not ſpeak ſuch things *as miniſter grace to the hearers*; whatſoever be the meaning of that phraſe. It is plain that the apoſtle doth not require of us that our ſpeeches ſhould always be for edification, and that they ſhould always miniſter grace unto the hearers; for there is no ſuch word as *always* in the text: and indeed, the thing itſelf is impoſſible, and therefore certainly he doth not always condemn us when our ſpeeches are not ſo. But this is that which he exhorts us to, as we have ability, and as we have opportunity put into our hands, that we ſhould make uſe of them for the purpoſes of edifying our brethren, that our diſcourſe *may miniſter grace to the hearers*. Our communication is lawful and allowable, tho' it do not miniſter to edification, provided it be innocent. But it is then praiſe-worthy, and ſuitable to the excellency of that religion we have taken upon us, when we make it uſeful and edifying to others. And this we ought to do as often as we can. This, I take it, is the general ſenſe of the apoſtle's words.

2*dly*, But, ſecondly, let us a little more particularly conſider this text. And here two things are to be enquired into.

Firſt,

First, What is here meant by the phrase *to the use of edifying*.—Secondly, What is meant by the phrase *of ministring grace to the hearers*.

(1.) As to the first, the answer is short, *viz.* That when the apostle exhorts that our *communication should be such as is good, to the use of edifying*, that phrase imports no more than this, that which is good to the use of instruction, * or that which is good to the instruction of use; for both these ways the words may be render'd: that is to say, (as most expositors explain it) "Let your speech be such as tends to that useful instruction, that every body you converse with have need of, or occasion for." Or thus, Let your speech be pertinent, and someways fitting the needs and exigencies of those you have to deal with. This, I think, is the full sense of the former phrase.

(2.) And then, in the second place, as for the latter, *viz. that it may minister grace to the hearers*, Grotius's note here is, "that you may deserve well of your hearers, by being useful to them." Dr. Hammond's note is, "that your speech may bring advantage to them who hear you." So that in truth, all that is meant and enjoined by this text comes to this, (I give it you in the words of another excellent expositor of holy scripture, *viz.* Vorstius) "Let no corrupt or vicious communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is useful and pertinent, as there is occasion, that so not only your speech may be acceptable to, and well received by them who hear it, but may also, some way or other, profit them, and be of advantage to them."

This, I verily believe, is both the true and the full sense and importance of these words. It is not here said that our speech ought always to be serious, much less that it ought always to be about matters of religion, or always

* οἰκοδομὴν τῆς χρείας.

always to tend to ſpiritual edification; but that it always ought to be pertinent and proper to the preſent occaſion: and, as far the occaſion will bear, it ſhould be uſeful and inſtructive to thoſe who hear it, ſo as that they may receive ſome benefit, ſome advantage from our diſcourſes, more or leſs, according as our own talents and abilities, or the circumſtances of the company, or the nature of the buſineſs before us do give us opportunity.

And if ſo, I appeal to any one, whether the moſt ſcrupulous perſon have any juſt reaſon from this text, to be afraid of any harmleſs mirth, and pleaſantneſs, and freedom in converſation; or to think himſelf, upon account thereof, obliged to talk nothing but what is grave and ſerious.

And thus I have vindicated the innocent liberties of common converſation from the objections which ſome devout, but melancholy perſons are apt to make againſt them.

II. But I muſt not leave the matter thus. The exhortation in my text is of too great moment to be ſlightly paſſed over; and therefore I ſhall proceed now, by way of application, to inforce the practice of that which the text, in the true ſenſe of it, recommends to us: *Let no corrupt communication*, ſays St. Paul, *proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the uſe of edifying, that it may miniſter grace to the hearers.*

Now to the obſerving this rule, it is ſuppoſed, not only that we have laid aſide all vicious and corrupt communication, that we have got over the common faults of mankind in their diſcourſes, *viz.* that we never talk unlawful forbidden things, and that none of our converſation is either againſt truth, or charity, or piety, or purity, which is the corrupt communication

that

that is prohibited by the laws of Chriſt. But, I ſay, if we would obſerve this rule, it is ſuppoſed further, that we make it one of the great buſineſſes of our converſation to do all the good we can; to help, and profit, and be uſeful to all we converſe with in all the ways which are in our power. Now there is no man living, who is not a natural or a lunatick, but is ſome way or other capable of practiſing this rule in his converſation; at leaſt at ſome times. He is an odd ſort of man, whatever his education, or profeſſion, or circumſtances be, who cannot ſometimes do ſervice by his communication to thoſe he converſeth with; (tho' otherwiſe much wiſer than himſelf) either by teaching them ſomething which he knows better than they, or informing them in ſomething which it concerns them to know, and yet they cannot come to the knowledge of it without that information. But as for thoſe upon whom God hath beſtowed any conſiderable degree of parts and talents, and eſpecially where thoſe parts have been improved by education or experience; they ought to remember that God hath beſtowed theſe bleſſings upon them not for their own ſakes only, but that they might be inſtruments of doing good to mankind by their communication. It is in their power, if they will, to make the moſt common diſcourſes they are engaged in, ſome way or other uſeful and beneficial to the hearers. And certainly, if all ſuch perſons would once try this way of converſation, *viz.* to talk as uſefully as they can to the company they are engaged in (in what way ſoever it be) they would ſoon find the comfort of it.

There is no doubt but that every night, when they come on their pillows to reflect on the actions of the day paſt, (as I believe men generally do not ſleep ſo ſoundly, but, whether they will or no, they make ſome reflections)

reflections) they would find a great deal of pleaſure in being able to ſatisfy themſelves, that that day hath not been ſpent unprofitably. Tho' they have been ingaged in ſeveral ſorts of converſation, yet they have endeavoured that their talk ſhould not have been altogether uſeleſs and impertinent. They have, ſome way or other, bettered the company, either by their notions, or inſtructions, or by their advices and cautions. This that I now ſay, hath reference to all ſorts of uſeful talk wherein the life of men is concerned, whether it be in matters of trade, or arts, or ſciences; or with reſpect to mens manners, or their civil and domeſtick concernments.

But there is one ſort of uſeful talk, which, I think, I ought to preſs a little more particularly upon this occaſion, and that is, in the points of piety and religion. Which I believe my text hath a particular reſpect to, tho' it ought not to be confined to them. St. Paul ſays, that *all our communication ſhould be good to the uſe of edifying.* I do not gather from hence, that all our diſcourſe ought to be about ſpiritual matters, or otherwiſe it is a corrupt communication, for this is the thing I have been all this while confuting: but this is that which I ſay, certainly ſpiritual things ought not to be wholly paſſed by in our common converſation. On the contrary, we ought to take all occaſions to ſpeak of them, this being the beſt and the nobleſt theme that we can employ our ſpeech about, and that which moſt tends to the benefit of others.

Pray hear what our apoſtle ſaith in another place, Col. iii. 16. *Let the word of Chriſt*, ſays he, *dwell in you richly, teaching and admoniſhing one another in pſalms, and hymns, and ſpiritual ſongs, ſinging with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* Theſe words import, that as we ſhould

ſhould always have a deep ſenſe of religion in our hearts, ſo we ſhould be endeavouring to impreſs it upon others. That we ſhould not only be fully poſſeſſed ourſelves with an entire eſteem and love of the goſpel of Chriſt, and a thankful heart to God for all his benefits, but that we ſhould make it our buſineſs to infuſe the ſame ſpirit of devotion into the minds of all we converſe with.

Oh, what a world of good might we do, if we would but thus manage our converſation among men! It is not my meaning here to encourage any one in a religious cant, or in a courſe of uſing ſcripture expreſſions in their common diſcourſes, or to adviſe any one to be always talking about ſpiritual matters, whether ſeaſonably or unſeaſonably. But this I ſay, It would become us all, in our ſeveral ſtations, to do as much good as we can. And therefore, wherever occaſion offers itſelf, if we can pertinently caſt in any thing in our diſcourſe, that either tends to the impreſſing on our company a ſenſe of God, or to the confirming them in a belief of chriſtianity, or to the amending any defect we ſee in them, or to the arouſing them to a more hearty lively exerciſe of devotion, we ſhould do extremely well to take the opportunity.

This I am confident of, that if the devout and ſerious men among us, they who have a hearty ſenſe of religion, (tho' the number of them be but ſmall in compariſon of the reſt of mankind) would but make it their buſineſs in all their converſation heartily to ſtand up for the intereſts of God and virtue, as opportunity fairly leads them to it, by diſcouraging vice, and immorality, and infidelity, wherever they may decently do it; and by taking all occaſions of recommending the practice of holineſs and virtue, we ſhould, in a little time,

time, ſee a much better world; nor would atheiſm, profaneneſs and irreligion be able to bear up and ſupport itſelf againſt the irreſiſtible evidence of truth.

But, alas! we think not much of theſe things. It is enough for us that we ſay our prayers in our cloſets, and have an inward reverence for God and religion. But as for the concerning ourſelves about it in our converſation, there we are to be excuſed. We do very well, and as much as we can hope for, if we can avoid the vices and irregularities of diſcourſe: but to talk of promoting piety, that doth not belong to us. But why ſhould piety be baniſhed all our diſcourſe? Why ſhould we not take occaſion to mingle ſomething of that in our common converſation, as well as thoſe many impertinent things that come into our heads? Are not the arguments of religion; are not the being of a God and his providence, and the truth and excellence of Chriſt's religion; are not the unexceptionable reaſonableneſs of virtue and holineſs, and the infinite eternal rewards we may attain to thereby; I ſay, Are not theſe things of as great concernment to us, as the faſhion of our apparel, or a new play, or a ſtory of an amour, or how ſuch a perſon managed in ſuch an affair, or how things go at court, or what account the foreign letters give of the tranſactions abroad? I ſay, Are not the former things a thouſand times of more concernment to us than theſe? Nay, and are they not more proper, and every way more fit for us to talk of? Nay, I will add further, Are they not more delightful and entertaining to any well-diſpoſed perſon, than the other? There is not the leaſt doubt of it. All that is to be ſaid, is, that there is cuſtom for the one, but not for the other. But why ſhould evil and unreaſonable cuſtoms be kept up, eſpecially when

when ſo much good would accrue to mankind from the breaking of them? I declare all this time I am not for a preaching, canting converſation. I would have no one break the rules of common decency, for the ſake of talking religiouſly out of ſeaſon. The thing I recommend, is to be managed with prudence; and chiefly I propoſe it in ſuch converſations, where there is an entire friendſhip and intimacy. Here, I ſay, eſpecially lies our opportunity of doing much good to one another by our diſcourſes. Here we may, without the imputation of ſingularity or affectation, mingle moſt ſerious ſavoury things with our common talk: here we have opportunity of inſtructing one another in matters of ſalvation; of reproving one another for our faults; of exhorting one another to a ſerious regard to our eternal intereſts; of exciting one another to grow more and more in all goodneſs and virtue. Here we may, without ill manners, warm one anothers hearts, by recounting God's innumerable favours to us, by ſetting forth his praiſe, and declaring his moſt wonderful works, and comforting one another with the promiſes he hath given us in being our God, and making us heirs of eternal life.

And this let me ſay further, for the encouragement of all pious perſons in this religious communication, *viz.* that they can ſeldom uſe any of this diſcourſe in good earneſt, but it will have ſome good effect. Tho' their friends, to whom it is ſpoken, do not ſeem at preſent to be much wrought upon by it, yet it is not wholly loſt upon them. They think of it afterwards, and, in all probability, it proves either a ſtep to their converſion, or at leaſt a check to their further proceeding in wickedneſs. I doubt not, but all religious talk, if it be warm, and withal prudent, is as much catching,

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and doth as much execution towards the making men good, as the corrupt and profligate converſation of the world doth towards the making them bad. And yet of the efficacy and miſchief of that, we all are ſufficiently ſenſible, and have too great reaſon to complain.

SER-

SERMON XIV.

How far God is concerned in the temptations to sin, which happen to mankind.

JAMES i. 13.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

THAT which I design to treat upon from this text is this; how far God is concerned in the temptations to sin which happen to mankind. To which I shall, without any further preface, apply myself, and have four things to offer, or four propositions to lay down about this point, which will take in all that is needful for the explaining the doctrine of St. James in my text, *of God's tempting no man*, and reconciling it with other scriptures, where it is said that *God doth tempt men*; and also afford us useful matter for practical application.

I. The first proposition I lay down about God tempting men, is this:

If we take temptation for the making of a trial of mens inward qualities and dispositions, (as the word is sometimes taken in that latitude) then it is very certain that God doth tempt men. For he often so dispenseth

diſpenſeth his providence towards them, and puts them into thoſe circumſtances, rather than others, on purpoſe to prove the frame and temper of their minds, how they ſtand to him. What I now ſay is perfectly the language of ſcripture, as to this matter. There we meet with two ſorts of temptations, wherewith God is ſaid to tempt his ſervants; the one by words, the other by deeds. Of the former kind we have but one inſtance, but it is a remarkable one; and that is God's tempting of Abraham, by laying a command upon him to offer up his only ſon in ſacrifice to him. Thus Gen. xxii. 1. *And it came to paſs after theſe things, that God did tempt Abraham, ſaying, take now thy ſon, thine only ſon Iſaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains that I ſhall ſhew thee.* Now what end this temptation was for (or at leaſt one of the ends) appears by the 12th verſe, where, after Abraham had put all things in readineſs towards the fulfilling of God's command, he tells him, *Now I know*, ſays he, *that thou feareſt God, ſince thou haſt not with-held thy ſon, thine only ſon from me.* Here was a ſtrange trial of Abraham's obedience; he is commanded by God to do that which God himſelf had no mind ſhould be done, as the event ſhewed. But this was an inſtance of God's temptation, which ſtands alone by itſelf, and there is nothing like it in the whole ſcripture. And it may be queſtioned, whether any man in the world, beſides Abraham, was ever thus tempted.

And as for the other way of tempting men, *viz.* by his dealings with them, or by the diſpenſations of his providence towards them, there are abundance of inſtances to be given of it in ſcripture. Thus Moſes

tells the children of Israel, that all his dealings with them in the wilderness for forty years, was *for the tempting of them, to know what was in their hearts, and whether they would keep his commandments or no*, Deut. viii. 2. And in Exodus, when the people were in a great consternation at the thundring and lightnings, and other manifestations of God's presence, which they had heard and seen in the mount, Moses saith unto them, *Fear not, for God is come to tempt you, and that his fear may be before your face, that ye sin not*, Exod. xx. 20. And lastly, to name no more texts, when Moses had told the people of the arising of false prophets among them, that would endeavour to seduce them to idolatry, by the means of the great signs and wonders that they would work for the confirmation of their wicked doctrines; yet for all that, saith he, *Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of those prophets, for the Lord your God doth hereby tempt you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul*, Deut. xiii. 3.

In some of these texts our English translation reads proving instead of tempting. But the original word is the same in all; and it is the word which, when it is referr'd to other persons besides God, is always render'd tempting. It is certain then, that God in his providence doth frequently tempt men; that is to say, puts them into this or the other condition, or suffers this or the other event to fall upon them, for the trying of their virtue, for the proving their fidelity, and patience, and courage, and constancy, and the like.

And this it is fit we should all seriously reflect upon, and apply to ourselves, especially when any unusual extraordinary event of divine providence, whether good or bad, is dispensed to us. For even the happy,

prosperous circumstances of our lives (as we account them) may be many times ordered in the way of temptation to us, that is, for the trial of our virtue and adherence to God. But the bad are certainly temptations, and accordingly have that name in the scriptures. Thus in the 2d verse of that very chapter where my text is, *Count it all joy*, says the apostle, *when ye fall into divers temptations*, viz. *afflictions*, *knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience.* And again, 1 Pet. vi. 7. *Ye are now in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith may be found to praise, and honour, and glory, in the day when Jesus Christ shall be revealed.*

This is the scripture account of these matters. But here a question may arise. You say that God, in these dispensations of his providence, makes trial or experiment whether men be good or bad. But to what purpose is this? God knows that beforehand. He know certainly not only what every man can do, but what every man will do, when he is placed in such and such circumstances. And therefore to talk of trying or proving mens virtue, by these methods, seems a needless thing.

To this I answer, that it is true God knows so well what is in man, that he needs not make any experiment upon him for the satisfying himself about his behaviour in any contingency. And therefore it is certain, that these trials, proofs, or experiments (as the scripture calls them) are not made for the satisfying God, but for other wise, and virtuous, and good ends. And tho' the phrase in scripture be such as seems to intimate that God sends these temptations, that he may know whether they, who are exercised by them, do bear an honest mind towards him, yet un-

doubtedly, this is said ἀνθρωποπαθῶς, as the divines speak; that is to say, these are forms of speech borrowed from our dealings one with another; as God is said *to go down and enquire whether the wickedness of Sodom was really so great as the cry thereof*, Gen. xviii. 21. And abundance of such idioms we have in scripture. Indeed, I may say, that almost the whole language of the old testament, with relation to God, is of that kind. But the true sense and importance of these passages, is no more than this: that these kind of dispensations of God's providence to men, are great exercises of their virtue, and great proofs, whereby they may evidence, both to themselves and those about them, that they are what they pretend to be; and lastly, great occasions of benefits and advantages, both to themselves and others. They are indeed truly and properly trials and experiments, because a man is truly and properly experimented by them. But then, the end of this is not to instruct God, or to make him certain of that which he was uncertain of before; but partly to instruct men what they are to think of themselves, and what others are to think of them, (which, without these trials, they would not have been able to do) and partly to bring a great deal of good to the world, and to those persons in particular, who are exercised by these trials.

Two inferences, by way of application, I desire to draw from what has been said upon this point, before I go any further.

First, Let us from hence be instructed never to judge of God's love or hatred to persons by the outward circumstances that do befal them. Do not conclude, because thou art more fortunate in this world than thy neighbour; because thou art, by strange uncom-

mon accidents, advanced, as to thy outward condition; becauſe thou are bleſſed in thy baſket and in thy ſtore, in thy family and in thy relations, above thine own expectations, or the ordinary ſucceſſes of other mens endeavours: I ſay, do not conclude from hence, that therefore thou art a greater favourite of God's, than they who have not ſped ſo well. Oh! this is a very falſe way of arguing. God might have a great many other ends to ſerve by theſe diſpenſations of his providence towards thee, different from thoſe thou dreameſt of. And perhaps this was one: he meant, that theſe happy circumſtances (as thou accounteſt them) ſhould be ſent unto thee by way of temptation; that they ſhould be trials and experiments of thy virtue; and according as thou didſt uſe them, or behave thyſelf under them, ſo ſhould they prove a bleſſing or a curſe to thee. If thou beareſt thyſelf with an even and compoſed mind, and makeſt uſe of thoſe advantages thou haſt above other men for the doing more good in the world than other men, and in the midſt of thy proſperity neither vainly pleaſeſt thyſelf, nor diſpiſeſt others, but walkeſt reverently and humbly with thy God in all thy converſation, then thou haſt ſome reaſon to conclude, that theſe things are really a bleſſing to thee, for thou acquitteſt thyſelf under theſe trials as thou ſhouldeſt do; and there is no doubt but thy virtue will be approved by God, as well as commended by men; and thy ſplendid circumſtances will never ſo riſe up in judgment againſt thee another day, as to occaſion that heavy ſentence that was paſſed upon the rich man in the goſpel, (which, in truth, ſhould make every rich or great man to tremble when he thinks of it) *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time received*

teivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented, Luke xvi. 25.

But, on the other side, if thy prosperity tempt thee to pride and insolence, to the forgetfulness of God, and the contempt of men; if thou usest the advantage of thy power to oppress the weak, and of thy wit to over-reach the simple, and of thy wealth to minister to the purposes of vice and luxury, *to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*; then thy great successes, by which thou measurest God's love to thee, are not a blessing (however they were intended) but a curse. God hath thought fit to try thee in those soft and pleasing ways, and thy virtue hath not been strong enough to abide the trial; but thou art found reprobate.

Again, do not conclude, because God suffers thee to fall into many difficulties and afflictions; because thou art pressed with hard and pinching circumstances; because thou art visited with sad and grievous losses, or with long and painful sickness, or with the death or miscarriage of thy nearest relations, or the like heavy misfortunes: do not, I say, conclude from hence that God is angry with thee, or that he hath no kindness for thee: no; these are no greater marks of God's displeasure, than the other instances I before-mentioned were of his favour. The best of his children he thinks fit to exercise in this way. And tho' these chastisements may sometimes truly enough be said to have the nature of punishments and corrections for something that is amiss in us, yet it is certain they are trials also, experiments which he makes of us, whether we so heartily cleave to him with our whole

ſoul's as we pretend to do, and as we ought to do. And therefore,

Which is the ſecond inference I draw from this diſcourſe, we ought not only not to repine when ſuch temptations as theſe are caſt in our way, but to rejoice under them, and be thankful for them. *Count it all joy*, ſays the apoſtle, James i. 2. *when ye fall into divers temptations*; for aſſuredly there is no harm meant to thee, or any body elſe, by theſe ſevere uſages, but on the contrary a great deal of good. For God, as St. Paul tells us, Heb. xii. *deals not with us as the fathers of our fleſh often do, who chaſten us for their own pleaſure; but he doth it for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holineſs.* God takes no pleaſure in ſeeing thee, or any of his creatures, uneaſy, or in hard and difficult circumſtances; for it is not in his nature willingly to grieve and afflict the children of men. But thy good, and the world's good, require that thou ſhouldeſt be thus exerciſed. A great many excellent ends, both for thy benefit and the benefit of others, were intended by theſe diſpenſations of providence to thee, which I have not now time to dilate upon. Thou waſt not, perchance, ſo careful and diligent about thy duty as thou ſhouldeſt have been, and therefore it was fit that thou ſhouldeſt, by ſome ſharp affliction, be awaken'd and arouſed to a ſenſe of it. Thy heart and affections, it is like, were too much engroſſed by thoſe earthly goods thou didſt enjoy; and therefore, in kindneſs to thee, God took them away, that thou mighteſt be brought to a more entire dependance on him, and a cloſer walking with him. There was this or the other luſt remained unmortified in thee, which occaſion'd thy making many falſe ſteps in the way of God's commandments.

mandments. But by the chastisements which are sent unto thee (which are generally so proportioned to our faults, that they may be said to bear the characters, or signatures of them) thou mayst be taught to walk more evenly and circumspectly. And this lesson David tells us, he learned no where so well as in the school of afflictions; *Till I was afflicted* (says he, Psal. cxix. 67.) *I went wrong; but now have I kept thy word.*

But admit there was no great matter amiss in thy heart or in thy conversation, so that thy sufferings have not properly the notion of chastisements or corrections, (but, oh God, where is the man that lives so innocently as to be able to think so of himself?) but admit that thou didst live without blame, yet is it any harm to thee that thou hast opportunities put into thy hands of improving thy virtues and good qualities? Is it not for thy advantage that God will not suffer thee to content thyself with the ordinary attainments of common christians, but trains thee up in such a discipline, as thou must be necessarily put upon a constant exercise of all thy virtues, especially the more noble ones, of patience and fortitude, and contempt of the world, and absolute resignation to God; that by this means thou mightest make a greater proficiency than ordinary in all divine graces; that by this means the trial of thy faith might be found honourable and glorious; and lastly, that by this means thou mightest be made conformable to the example of thy Saviour, who was made perfect by sufferings. And who knows likewise but God may exercise thee thus for the sake of other men? Examples of those virtues which are chiefly seen and expressed in afflicted circumstances, as they are most naked to the world;

ſo where-ever they are given, they ſeem to be moſt inſtructive, and moſt effectual for the working upon thoſe who are ſpectators of them. God therefore, by putting thee to combate with more than ordinary difficulties, it is likely meant and deſign'd thee for a publick benefit: he hath brought thee, as it were, upon a ſtage, that others may behold thy carriage and behaviour under thy afflictions, and take pattern from thee how they are to behave themſelves when they are tempted, and to inſtruct them what degrees of virtue are in this life to be attained, and ſhould by good men be aſpired after. And ſure, in all this, there is no unkindneſs meant thee, but a great and ſignal favour; for by theſe trials thou comeſt to know thyſelf, which, without them, thou couldeſt not have done. Thou haſt now ſome experience of the reality of thoſe pretenſions thou makeſt to piety and virtue. Thou canſt now, with a great deal of ſatisfaction, evidence to thyſelf, that thou art in deed, and in truth, what thou didſt profeſs, a follower of Chriſt Jeſus in all the ways, that he went before thee. And therefore, ſince thy faith and virtue did not fail thee in the day of temptation, what haſt thou to do, but to reflect upon thine own condition with a great deal of pleaſure and joy. How much eaſe and peace will this very conſideration bring to thy mind? Thou haſt been tempted, and thou art found faithful. No happineſs, no enjoyment in this world, can yield a thouſandth part of that pleaſure and comfort that this very reflection will afford to thee.

Which will be further heighten'd, when thou conſidereſt that all the temptations of this kind that it ſhall pleaſe God to try thee with, do not only ſerve to confirm thy preſent hope of happineſs, but ſhall ex-

extremely tend to the increase of thy rewards, when the righteous judge of the world shall come to make retribution to mankind for what they have done in the flesh. At that day shalt thou bless God most heartily for every thing that hath come cross to thee, or wherein thou hast been tempted; *For these short afflictions*, as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. iv. [illegible]*th are but for a moment, will work for thee a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* This is, in some measure, true of all afflictions and sufferings of God's sending, that are patiently and christianly borne. But if the sufferings that God calls thee out unto be for the sake of virtue and a good conscience, or for the name of Jesus Christ, then we may use our Saviour's words in the 6th of St. Luke, *Rejoyce*, O christian, *in that day, and even leap for joy, for exceeding great shall thy reward be in heaven; for in this manner it was done unto the prophets*; and in this manner likewise it was done to thy Lord and Master, and to his apostles, and to the most glorious of his saints in all ages.

II. The second thing I desire to be considered about this business, is this; that tho' it be allowed that God may be said to tempt men, taking temptation for a mere trial of mens virtue and sincerity, yet, if we will take the word in the sense that it is commonly used in, *viz.* for an active sollicitation to that which is evil, in this sense we say it is not in the nature of God to tempt any of his creatures. And this is the proper meaning of my text, *Let no man say, when he is tempted, that he is tempted of God, for God tempteth no man*; that is to say, God is not the cause that any man falls into sin by temptation; neither doth he put any man into such circumstances, that he must necessarily and unavoidably be a transgressor of God's

laws in them: neither, thirdly, doth he, in any condition of life, actually follicit or intice a man from his duty: neither, in the fourth place, let a man be under what temptations he will, doth God ever incline or excite his heart to close with them, or create or stir up any corruptions in him to take fire from them. In none of these senses doth God tempt any man; for he is of purer eyes than to behold, or approve, any iniquity of any kind, in any person whatsoever; and therefore certainly he will have no hand in the producing of it. And that is the meaning of the reason which the apostle gives, why *God tempteth no man: God*, says he, *cannot be tempted with evil, and he tempteth no man*; *viz.* God, who cannot by any means be drawn to iniquity himself, will certainly never draw others to it. His nature is infinite holiness and purity; and there is nothing in the world so contrary to it, as vice and sin. And therefore we cannot imagine that he will any way be the author or abettor, or promoter of that which he most hates; the tempter to that which of all things in the world is most displeasing to him; nay, which of all things in the world he hath only an aversion to. Nay, further; so far is God from tempting to sin in any of the senses I have now mentioned, that he is always ready to assist us in all the temptations which do assault us, that we be not overcome by them. This is the

III. Third proposition I lay down in this matter.

A thousand temptations doth he really prevent, which would otherwise come upon us, scattering the snares of our malicious adversary, and counter-working his stratagems. And whatever temptations he doth suffer us to fall into, yet, if we beg his help and protection,

protection, he will not fail to give us such strength, as we shall be able to vanquish them.

If the circumstances of our lives were left to our own conduct, the devil, whose business it is in the world to seduce mankind, would soon make a prey of us; nor would there be any possibility of avoiding his nets. But the same God, who hath set bounds to the floods of the sea, hath also set bounds to the incursions of our enemy, saying, hitherto shalt thou go, and no further. And even in those cases where he doth suffer the tempter to spread his nets, yet, by that merciful providence which watches over mankind, his designs are so defeated, that oftentimes he hath not that success which he desires or expects, even upon those that are not so very good, or so careful of their own ways, as they should be. Even as to these, the restraining grace of God is often so powerful, or he so interposes by unforeseen providences, as to preserve them from such grievous falls and mischiefs, as, had they been left to their own virtue and counsel, they could not have prevented.

But then, as for those who have the fear of God before their eyes, and do sincerely endeavour, in all their actions, to approve themselves to him, these persons are under so particular a care and protection of God, that whatever temptations God thinks fit to exercise them with, they shall be supported under them, and endowed with sufficient strength to overcome them. For our Lord Jesus Christ, *who was in all things tempted like unto us* (as the apostle tells us Heb. iv. 15. ii. 18.) *is abundantly both able and willing to succour us when we are tempted.* And tho' he do not sometimes upon our prayers remove the temptation from us so soon as we may desire, yet that

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which comforted St. Paul in this case, ought to satisfy us also, viz. *That his grace is sufficient for us*, 2 Cor. xii. 9.

IV. My fourth and last proposition is, God doth not only not tempt us to sin, and assist us likewise against the temptations of sin, but, (which deserves to be especially considered in this argument) he is always, on the contrary, tempting us from sin, if we may so use that word, which is commonly taken in a bad sense. The devil is not more ready to infuse bad thoughts into our hearts, than the Holy Spirit of God is to inspire us with those that are good. The devil is not more diligent to make use of every object, every occasion that presents itself to us, for the soliciting us from our duty, than the Holy Spirit of God is to take every opportunity of darting his holy motions into our minds, and thereby exciting us and persuading us to virtue and obedience. As we are encompassed by a multitude of evil angels, that labour to circumvent us; so are there, no doubt, as many good angels, that watch over us for our good. And as those are wonderfully busy and active to throw rubs and stumbling-blocks in our way; so, on the other side, these are every whit as industrious not only to help us to get over those difficulties and temptations, but to present us with fair occasions of making our own advantage by them. Here are then temptations on both sides, and tempters on both sides, to set home those temptations. The only question is, Whether of these have the greater force? But this question needs no great labour or skill to answer it. It is just as if we should ask, Whether God or the devil be stronger? Whether the temptation of a light momentary pleasure, and that mingled with a great deal

deal of trouble and vexation, can be more prevalent over a reasonable creature, than the hopes of an inconceivably great and eternal weight of glory? Or, lastly, Whether the spirit, that works in the children of disobedience, can over-power that Spirit of Christ, which once triumph'd over all the powers of darkness, and made shew of them openly? But certainly this can bear no dispute. For every one, that believes God to govern the world, and Christ Jesus to have been sent by him, will readily say with the apostle, in the 4th of the 1st of St. John, that *greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world.* That is, the good Spirit of God, and his holy angels that do attend him, are far more willing and more powerful to do us good, to tempt us to our profit, than the devil and his angels can be to do us hurt, and to tempt us to our mischief. And if any of us do miscarry, the reason is, not that we have not more strong temptations to virtue than to vice, but because we are unaccountably *drawn away by our own lusts, and inticed,* as St. James expresses it in the words after my text.

The application I desire to make to these three last points is two-fold.

In the first place, let every one learn, from what has been said, never to charge the sins or miscarriages of his life, either directly or indirectly, upon God. Let no body say, when he hath lived a careless or a lewd life, or is under the power and dominion of any vicious habit, that God was any way the cause of it; for *God tempteth no man.*

And here two sorts of persons are to be blamed:

First, They who excuse their sins upon a pretence that the condition of their lives did necessarily engage them in them. Such temptations were naturally consequent

ſequent upon the circumſtances that divine providence had placed them in, that they muſt have been more than men to have reſiſted them. But this is a very unreaſonable pretence; for it is certain, God never puts thee into ſuch a condition, but thou mighteſt, if thou pleaſed, not only live very innocently in it, but laudably too: ſo as not only to have done thyſelf a great deal of good, but alſo to have brought honour to thy chriſtian profeſſion. And if thou art in circumſtances wherein thou canſt not ſo behave thyſelf, it is certain God did not place thee in them, but thine own folly and evil courſes have brought them upon thee.

Secondly, As much to be blamed are they who plead the want of God's grace for the wickedneſs of their lives; who think that the ſpiritual aſſiſtances, which God afforded them, were not ſufficient for the reclaiming the badneſs of their natures. But how vain is this pretence? Canſt thou ſay, that ever in thy life thou didſt an evil action for which thy conſcience flew in thy face, but thou mighteſt have avoided it, if thou hadſt pleaſed, as well as done it? Was ever God wanting to thee? Haſt thou not found his Holy Spirit ready at all times to ſuggeſt good thoughts to thy mind, and to give thee powerful reaſons why thou ſhouldeſt not yield to the preſent temptation? And if thou wouldeſt have conſidered them, thou hadſt certainly not done as thou didſt. This, if thou wilt conſult thine own conſcience, thou canſt not deny. And if thou haſt now brought thyſelf to ſuch a pitch of impotence or ſottiſhneſs, that thou art blindly hurried away by thy appetites and paſſions, and ſeemeſt to be under a neceſſity of ſinning, who art thou to thank for this, but thyſelf? God gave thee grace ſufficient; nay, for any thing thou doſt or can know to the contrary, as much grace as he

giveth

giveth to any man in thy circumstances. But thou, by despising it, and constantly abusing it, hast made thyself unworthy of it: And now, perhaps, God hath withdrawn it, *and given thee over to a reprobate mind to commit sin with greediness*, Eph. iv. 19. without check or reluctancy whilst it is a committing, and without reflection or remorse afterwards.

This, it is true, is a dismal condition; but it is thou that hast brought thyself into it; and that very consideration, if thou shouldest die in that condition, will be the greatest torment to thee hereafter, *viz.* to think that God was not wanting to thee any ways, but thou mightest have been as eternally happy as any saint in heaven, but that thou, silly, inconsiderate fool as thou wert, having a prize put into thy hands, hadst not an heart to make use thereof.

The second use I would make of the doctrine I have delivered, is, for the encouragement of all christians to go vigorously in the christian warfare, how many temptations soever they may be assaulted with.

And here likewise the foregoing discourse naturally leads me to recommend two things to you, in order to that encouragement. I just name them, and conclude.

First, Do you find it a difficult matter to live virtuously, and to preserve your innocence in this world, thro' the multitude of temptations and snares with which you are every where beset? Be not dismay'd at this, neither cease your endeavour to live as you should do: only put your trust in God, and, by constant application to him, cast yourselves under his protection. Assure yourselves, that if you seriously mind his service, and, with all your souls, endeavour to recommend yourselves to him, he will take care of you. He

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will support you. He will so order matters, as that either such trials and temptations, as you most dread, shall not come upon you; or if they do come, he will give you strength to go thro' with them, and *the trials of your faith* shall succeed *to praise, and honour, and glory*, (as St. Peter speaks, 1 Pet. i. 7.) Never was any man baffled by the devil, or any of his artifices, that did heartily cleave to God, and constantly implore his protection. It is either our own gross carelessness in the ways of God, or our immoderate vicious concern for our worldly or sensual interests, that occasions our fall in the day of temptation. Let us entirely devote ourselves to God, and follow the dictates of our conscience in the plain instances of our duty, and there is no doubt but he will direct us, and govern us in all the circumstances and all the events of our lives, and bring us safely at last, thro' all the temptations of this world, to his everlasting kingdom.

The second thing I would recommend to you upon occasion of this discourse, is, that you would not take too short and scanty measures of what a christian ought to do, or what he may attain to, upon account of the manifold temptations that do assault you. You may be apt to think, because your natures are so very weak and frail, and temptations so thick and powerful, that it is but exceeding little, that with all your endeavours you are able to perform in a virtuous and religious life. If you can but keep out of gross sins, and make a shift to say your prayers constantly, and so frame your lives, that your conscience doth not accuse you of the great immoralities of human life, you think is as great an attainment as is to be expected. Why I grant even this is very well; and I would to God that all our professors of christianity would go thus far. We should then have

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a much better world than we have. But is there no more expected from christians? Hath God shewed you your duty so clearly in his holy word? Hath he given you such exceeding precious promises to excite you to the performance of that duty? Hath he laid such inexpressible obligations upon you to be serious and diligent in it? And, lastly, doth he every day encourage you with such powerful assistances, tempting you more strongly than the devil and all his agents can do: giving his Holy Spirit into your hearts to guide and direct you, to comfort and refresh you, to strengthen and establish you, and sending forth likewise his holy angels to be a guard about you, and to defend you continually from the snares and machinations of the powers of darkness? And after all this considered, can you satisfy yourselves with this, that you are not very bad?

For shame! christians, if ye will be called by that name, rouze up yourselves to better thoughts. Do not take up with such a low degree of virtue, as that which you seem to have set to yourselves; but aspire after greater matters. Labour to be like your Lord and Master, *who though he was tempted in all things like us*, yet vanquished all temptations, and ran a glorious course, which he hath proposed to all his disciples to follow him in.

Look upon those that next followed him; the great apostles, the glorious martyrs, the whole succession of christians for some ages. They all call upon you to be followers of them, as they were of Christ Jesus. They were eminent in their generation, and shone forth as lights in the world. They did not think it enough not to live viciously, but thought themselves obliged to give examples of a great virtue to others, *abounding in all the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, and long-suffering,*

fering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, faith, meekneſs, temperance, and every other excellent quality.

And now theſe are all dead in the faith of Chriſt, and have attained the glorious rewards that our Lord promiſed. And ſhall not we who ſurvive, and expect to be crowned at laſt, as they are, ſhall not we give ſome teſtimonies that we are their ſucceſſors? At leaſt that we are of that religion that they were of? We have the ſame precepts that they had; the ſame promiſes, and the ſame aſſiſtances. Where then is our chriſtianity, if we do not imitate them? Oh then, let us endeavour to walk in their ſteps: Let us at leaſt *lay aſide every weight, and all the ſins that do ſo eaſily beſet us*, and run with patience and chearfulneſs, with zeal and perſeverance, that noble race that is ſet before us; which that we may all do, God of his infinite mercy grant, *&c.*

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SERMON XV.

The vanity of worldly happineſs.

ECCLES. ii. 11.

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and behold, all was vanity and vexation of ſpirit, and there was no profit under the ſun.

THESE Words contain one of thoſe concluſions that Solomon draws from the ſeveral experiments which he had made in his ſearch after happineſs. And if we conſider by whom they were ſpoken, and upon how much conſideration, and after what trials and experience; we may depend upon it that they are, tho' a ſhort, yet a very true deſcription and repreſentation of the ſtate of human life: and conſequently, that there is very little proſpect of any man's being happy here, that hath no views beyond the things of this preſent world. There is no man living can ever expect to be in more happy outward circumſtances than Solomon was, or to enjoy more

more of this world's good than Solomon did. And if he, after all, found nothing but labour and trouble, and diſſatisfaction and emptineſs, no real profit, no advantage in any worldly thing, what muſt we, *that come after the King* (as he expreſſeth it in this chapter; ver. 12. what muſt we) expect to find? Certainly no better fortune than he did.

And if this be the caſe of mankind, how unaccountable is it, that any of us ſhould fix our thoughts and deſigns, our comforts and expectancies upon any thing under the ſun. And yet, God knows, thus moſt of us do; *Though the bed is ſhorter than that we can ſtretch ourſelves upon it, and the covering narrower than that we can wrap ourſelves in it* (as the prophet ſpeaks, Iſa. xxviii. 20.) nay, tho' every thing in nature calls upon us, (in the words of another prophet, Micah ii. 10.) ſaying, *Ariſe, for this is not your reſt*; yet, vain men! we will needs ſet up our reſt here. We are willing to think of nothing farther than this world. We are ſo wholly immerſed in the buſineſſes and concernments of this preſent life, that we have no room or leiſure for the thoughts of that which is to come. If it would pleaſe God to let us live always as we do, we ſhould be well content, we ſhould deſire nothing more. We ſhould ſay to God, as one of the apoſtles did once to our Saviour, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*, Matt. xvii. 4.

But how abſurd are theſe wiſhes! How ridiculous is this carriage! Nothing in the world can apologize for it. It is juſt the ſame folly that thoſe men are guilty of, that being toſſed up and down at ſea, yet nevertheleſs deſire to be ſtill there, and cannot endure to think of coming to a port. It is the madneſs of thoſe, that being condemned to dig in the mines, are ſo much in love with

with toil and labour, with chains and darkneſs, that they deſpiſe a life above ground, a life of light and liberty. In a word, it is the fantaſtic puniſhment of Tantalus in the poets, that theſe men wiſh for themſelves: they deſire to ſpend their time for ever in gaping after thoſe lovely pleaſant fruits, which (they fanſy) ſeem almoſt to touch their mouths. Yet all their labour is in vain: and as they never did, ſo they never ſhall be able to come at them.

Will you give me leave, in purſuance of my text, to make good this by an induction of particulars. From hence you will too plainly ſee the truth of Solomon's propoſition, and conſequently how fooliſh it is to look for happineſs in any thing of this world.

1. And firſt of all, let us conſider the continual toil and labour that mankind in this world are expoſed to. Such is the ſtate of human things, that there are very few hours of our lives in which we are at eaſe, and free from care and travail: but moſtly we are in a hurry, and one labour ſtill ſucceeds on the neck of another. The diſpatching of one buſineſs is but the making room for ſome other, and poſſibly more troubleſome one, that is preſently to follow after. We toil till we are weary, and have exhauſted our ſtrength and ſpirits, and then we think to refreſh and recruit ourſelves: but, alas! that refreſhment is only to prepare and enable us for the bearing the next hour's burthen, which will enevitably come upon us. We are all of us, more or leſs, ſervants and bondmen, under a conſtant and fatal neceſſity of doing drudgery. What a world of pains and hardſhips is undergone by a great part of mankind merely for getting a livelihood, a ſubſiſtence for themſelves and their families? Though, God knows, it is oftentimes a very mean one; they, with all their toil

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and labour, having much ado to keep themselves from a prison or an hospital. As for others, that are put by providence into better outward circumstances, they are never a jot the more free from anxiety and cares. For tho' they are provided of necessary supports, yet the desire of maintaining their credit in the world, and living up to the height of their quality and fortune, or the ambition of advancing their families, and leaving their children in more splendid circumstances, than they find themselves; I say, one of these things puts them upon the necessity of continually harrassing their minds with worldly sollicitude and drudging, as if they had nothing to depend upon. Those that are not troubled with the pangs of covetousness, but are well content with that portion that God hath given them, yet find difficulty and vexation enough in the very discharge of their callings and employments. Or suppose they have no calling to follow, but seem to be loose from the world, yet it is scarce possible for them to live without driving on some designs, either of pleasure or ambition, or twenty other things, according as their temper inclines them. And the carrying on these designs, doth put their heads as much upon the rack, and oblige them to as laborious and active a diligence, as if they were some of the busy men of the world: nay, that course of life, which, of all others, seems the quietest and the least cumbersome, *viz.* the abstracting ourselves from the world, and applying our minds to contemplation and the knowledge of things, yet doth even that (such is our frame in this world) engage men in as much labour as any of the rest. *He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth trouble*, Eccl. i. 18. *And much study is a weariness of the flesh*, as Solomon tells us, chap. xii. 12.

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In a word, this whole life is nothing elſe but a circle of cares, and deſigns, and buſineſs, and vexations. *Man is born to labour and trouble, as the ſparks fly upwards*, Job v. 7. and therefore to term this ſublunary world a place of eaſe and repoſe, is the impropereſt name we can call it by.

2. But, ſecondly, this is not all: we might, poſſibly, find ſome comfort in that pains and labour we take in this world, at leaſt, they would be much more ſupportable, if we were ſure our deſigns would always ſucceed; if we were ſure to attain that which we labour for: but, alas! it is oftentimes quite otherwiſe. We meet with frequent diſappointments in our endeavours: nay, we cannot ſay before-hand, of any thing we undertake, that it ſhall certainly come to paſs as we would have it. And this is a matter that renders the world a place of ſtill more reſtleſsneſs and diſquiet. Would it not vex a man, when he hath ſet his heart upon a thing, and hath laid his plots for the bringing it about as well as the wit of man can deviſe, and hath purſued the buſineſs with great induſtry and diligence, hath made his friends, hath removed, as he thinks, all the rubs that lay between him and his deſigns, and hath brought matters to that paſs, that he ſeems juſt upon the point of obtaining his wiſhes; and yet in a moment, by ſome unforeſeen cauſe, or unthought-of accident, which it was not in the power of man to prevent, to be defeated of his expectations, to have his hopes blaſted, and to be but juſt where he was before? And yet this is nothing but what every day happens in the courſe of the world, and is impoſſible to be avoided. Nay, in truth, conſidering upon what a multitude of things the ſucceſs of our deſigns or endeavours doth depend, (none of which are yet in our power) we have reaſon to wonder

der that our labours do ſucceed ſo often as they do, rather than that they miſcarry ſo frequently.

If now it be a ſtate of happineſs to be always buſy and deſigning, and yet always to be uncertain whether our deſigns ſhall take effect; to be paſſionate, and earneſt, and impatient in our deſires of many things, and yet for once obtaining what we deſire, to be twice diſappointed; to tire ourſelves with buſtling to obtain our ends, and yet often to reap nothing but the wind for all our pains; I ſay, if this be happineſs, if this be the life we can ſit down content with, then we may call this world a happy place. Otherwiſe not.

3. But, thirdly, this is not all yet. Suppoſing, after ſeveral diſappointments, and with much difficulty, we do attain our ends, and get what our ſouls deſired, yet doth the thing anſwer our expectation? Do we find that it is fit, and good, and convenient for us? If ſo, then we ſeem to have laboured to ſome purpoſe. But if not, then we are but ſtill where we were; nay, we had better never have troubled our heads about it. But now that it frequently happens in the world that men long paſſionately, and take a great deal of pains for thoſe things which, when they are once poſſeſſed of, they find quite different from what they hoped for, and very much unfitting their circumſtances, is too much atteſted by the experience of mankind to be denied. We are fanciful in our deſires and appetites, and many times direct our choice and deſigns, not ſo much by our own needs and neceſſities, as the opinions of other men. We think every thing that is fine or brave, that is eſteemed or ſet by in the world, will preſently become us. But then, after we have with much toil got what we wiſhed for, then we find ourſelves miſtaken in our counſels, we ſee we had better have

been without thoſe things: we ſee that inſtead of contributing to our happineſs, they expoſe us to a great many more troubles and miſchiefs, than the condition we were in before. The truth is, we do not know before-hand what is good for us in this world, and yet we will not leave the ordering our condition to God, who only doth know. But we will needs be projecting for ourſelves, and we do, with might and main, carry on thoſe projects: and God is ſometimes pleaſed to permit them to take effect. And the event is, that by our own choice, and at the expence of abundance of pains, we make ourſelves unhappy. The generality of men, not content with that portion of outward goods which is allotted them, will needs be rich, in ſpite of their deſtiny; and ſome of them ſucceed in their wiſhes: but not having tempers and ſpirits contrived for great fortunes, this wealth of theirs doth engage them in many great follies and vices, (that without it poſſibly they had never been guilty of) which, in the end, do often prove their undoing. Thoſe that have no children, how deſirous are they of them! and yet who knows, but if God grant their deſires, thoſe children might prove the greateſt torments to them that ever befel them? Few love to live in obſcurity, but would be ſome-body, would be in a conſpicuous ſtation in the world: yet it may be, when they have attained to great places, they are not qualified for them, they are not fit to manage them; and their heads being too weak to look down from ſuch a precipice, they either grow dizzy and ſtand trembling, or tumble down with a much greater ruin. And as it is in theſe inſtances, ſo it is proportionably with moſt of the other deſigns we purſue in this world, whether they be little or great.

So that, in truth, the lot of mankind, in this life, is very hard. In all our labours, we either hit, or miſs; we either ſucceed, or are diſappointed. If we be diſappointed, we are certainly troubled: and if we do ſucceed, for any thing we know, that very ſucceſs may prove our greateſt unhappineſs.

4. But, fourthly, to go a little further yet; Let us ſuppoſe that we have brought no inconvenience upon ourſelves by our choice. Let us ſuppoſe our deſigns were reaſonable, and they rightly ſucceeded, and the circumſtances of our condition are every way fit and proper for us: yet, is this ſufficient to procure us content? May we then ſay to ourſelves, *Soul, take thine eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry?* Alas! there is too much reaſon to fear the contrary; for ſuch is the conſtitution of this world, that let us be in what circumſtances we will, yet we ſhall meet with many troubles and inconveniencies that do neceſſarily flow from the nature of that condition which we are in, tho' otherwiſe it may be the fitteſt for us of all others. There is no ſtate of life, even the moſt deſirable, but is attended with many peculiar diſadvantages of its own. Others poſſibly, that are at a diſtance, may not ſee this. They may think us very happy. They may admire our good fortune, that were born under ſuch lucky planets. They believe we live free from all manner of inquietude and diſcontent. But we know other things. We feel where our ſhoe pincheth us. We are ſenſible, that if others ſaw into our ſtate, as much as we do ourſelves, they would not be ſo apt to envy us. Nay, ſo far are even the happieſt among us, from pleaſing ourſelves in our ways of living, that we often think we ſee others that are happier than we, and with whom, as to many things, we would willingly change conditions

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Are we engaged in a life of action and buſineſs? How do we applaud the happineſs of thoſe that live in eaſe and privacy, and can command their own time. Do we, on the contrary, live in retirement, and have but few affairs to mind? Why then our time lies upon our hands, and we complain for want of employment, and call only thoſe happy that are men of buſineſs. Are we in great and ſplendid circumſtances, above the rank of common men? Then we feel the cares and burthens that this brings upon us, and only cry up the ſecure quiet ſtate of thoſe that live in a lower ſphere. But are we, on the contrary, in a low condition? Who then with us, but the great men, that carry the world before them? Thus are we generally unſatisfied with the preſent condition in which we are, and apt to like any other better than our own.

Now this kind of diſcontent doth not always ariſe from the inconſtancy of our minds, but from the particular grievances and inconveniencies that our ſtate of life is attended with; which we, being in that ſtate, are extremely ſenſible of: but we conſider not that there are the ſame, or as great, in other conditions. Briefly, our way in this world is all ſtrewed with briers and thorns; we can tread no where but our feet are pricked. There is no ſincere unmingled good to be met with. Every ſtate of life, as it hath ſomething of good in it, ſo the beſt hath ſome evil diſpleaſing appendages inſeparably adhering to it. Nay, perhaps, in true ſpeaking, the worldly happineſs of any man's condition is not to be meaſured by the multitude of goods he enjoyeth in it, but rather by the fewneſs of the evils it brings upon him.

5. But, fifthly, to go further yet; Let us ſuppoſe we find no inconvenience in the circumſtances of our

lives: we will ſuppoſe we are poſſeſſed of many goods, from the enjoyment of which we may promiſe to ourſelves ſolid contentment and ſatisfaction. Theſe are our preſent thoughts. But are we ſure we ſhall always continue in the ſame mind? Are we ſure that that which is now very grateful and agreeable, and affects us with a ſenſible pleaſure and delight, will continue always to do ſo? On the contrary, have we not much reaſon to fear, that, in a little time, it will grow dull and unaffecting; nay, poſſibly, very irkſome and diſpleaſing? Such is the nature of mankind, or the nature of things themſelves, that no earthly delight or comfort can pleaſe us long. We are, indeed, very fond of them at the firſt, and are much tickled and tranſported with them: but after we have a while enjoyed them, we are cloyed; our appetites to them are gone, and we throw them behind us, as children do thoſe play-toys that at firſt they were wonderfully fond of. The greateſt bleſſings of this world are to the mind of man, as any one ſort of fare, tho' never ſo delicious, is to a weak ſtomach; by long uſage they become flat and unſavoury, and have quite another reliſh than they had at firſt, when they were novelties to us.

6. But I have not yet done with this point. To all theſe things let us add, in the ſixth place, the numberleſs daily troubles and diſcompoſures of mind, not peculiar to any condition, as thoſe I ſpoke of before, but common to all, ariſing from mens minds and tempers, and the things and perſons they converſe with in the world. It is a melancholy conſideration; but I believe the experience of mankind will make it good, that there is ſcarce a day in our lives, that we paſs in perfect uninterrupted peace and content, but ſomething or other

ther every day happens that gives us trouble, and makes us uneaſy to ourſelves. Nor do I ſpeak this only of the extremely vicious, or the extremely unfortunate, the greateſt part of whoſe lives is certainly very irkſome and troubleſome to them, but of thoſe perſons that are the happieſt, thoſe that have the leaſt reaſon to complain either of their outward or inward condition.

Let any man pick out any day of his life, and ſeriouſly obſerve the particular paſſages of it, and the ſtate of his own mind under thoſe paſſages, and, I am confident, he will find, that tho' the evil of that day doth not counter-balance the good, yet it is ſufficient to interrupt his happineſs, and to render him very unſatisfied, as to ſeveral things. Either he finds himſelf dull, or out of humour; or he is perſecuted by ſome very unagreeable company; or he ſaith or doth ſomething that he afterwards ſeverely reflects on; or he is diſpleaſed with ſome language or carriage of others towards him; or he is put out of his temper by ſome ill news, or the miſcarriage of ſome of his affairs; or he finds ſome troubleſome paſſion to ariſe in him that diſturbs the peace of his ſpirit; he is rack'd with fears or with hopes; or diſcompoſed with anger and peeviſhneſs; or he is haunted with the memory of ſome paſt folly or ſin; or he is diſpirited with too much labour; or dull for want of employment; or vexed with ſome troubleſome buſineſs; or cloyed with his recreations and divertiſements; or ſomething or other he doth or ſuffereth that is not very grateful to him. The diſcontents which ariſe from ſuch cauſes as theſe, are indeed infinite and innumerable; and tho' ſingly taken, they are very ſmall matters, yet being taken in the lump, and likewiſe coming ſo thick upon us every day, they really

make human life, in the general, and as to moſt of the periods of it, to be a troubleſome, unquiet, unſatisfactory thing.

7. But, ſeventhly, if theſe little things I have mentioned be conſiderable enough to trouble our days, what muſt we ſay of the many ſad accidents, and more grievous and weighty afflictions, that do frequently exerciſe the patience of mankind? If in the beſt condition of human life, men are not happy, but every thing is able to ruffle and diſorder them; O how miſerable are they in the worſt! It is true, all men do not ſuffer equally, but ſome much more than others; but yet he that is afflicted leaſt in this world, hath his ſufficient ſhare of pain and anguiſh, and feels enough to try his courage and his patience to the uttermoſt; eſpecially if to the conſideration of his own ſufferings he adds the bitter things that he ſees others undergo, ſome of which may likewiſe come to his own ſhare before he goes out of the world.

It is able, in truth, to draw tears from one's eyes, ſeriouſly to reflect upon the ſad, deplorable, calamitous condition of a great part of mankind in this world; to exhibit to our minds that diſmal ſcene of things that are every day preſented to our eyes. Here are ſome languiſhing under a long and tedious diſtemper, unfit for all the functions, and incapable of any of the enjoyments of life. Others roaring out for the extremity of torture they ſuffer from the ſtone, or the gout, or an ulcer, or a broken limb, or ſome ſuch other tormenting accident. Others mourning for the loſs of a dear parent, on whom they depended; or the death of a child, who was the ſtay and comfort of their age. Others fretting and fuming for the diſgraceful circumſtances they are fallen into

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from an high fortune. Others even heart-broken, for the poverty and neceſſity to which they are reduced thro' the profuſeneſs of their lives, or the miſadventures of trade, or the ruins of a fire, or the calamities of a war. Others groaning and howling under the whips and ſtings of an awaken'd conſcience, being filled with horror and amazement, and deſpair, from the ſenſe of their crimes, and the apprehenſions of the vengeance of God in the other world. Others (which is indeed the ſaddeſt ſight of all) wallowing in all manner of ſenſuality and wickedneſs, giving up the reins to their brutiſh appetites, committing all ſorts of villanies, murders, rapines, and beaſtialities, without ſenſe of God or religion; regardleſs of their own ſouls, or the ſouls of others; diſhonouring their profeſſion, blaſpheming his name that made them, and, in a word, making all the haſte they can to everlaſting damnation.

Theſe things are very ſad, and muſt deeply affect us, tho' we ourſelves were not concerned in them. But, alas! we are none of us mere ſpectators of the miſeries of others; we muſt expect to bear a great part ourſelves in this tragedy. So long as we have mortal bodies expoſed to ſickneſs and diſeaſes, to ſad accidents and caſualties; ſo long as we have a frail nature, that betrays us to a thouſand follies and ſins; ſo long as we have dear friends and relations, or children, that we may be deprived of; ſo long as we may prove unfortunate in our marriage, or in our poſterity, or in the condition of life we have choſen; ſo long as there are men to ſlander us, or to rob us, or to undermine us; ſo long as there are ſtorms at ſea, or fire upon land; ſo long as there are enemies abroad, or tumults, ſeditions, and turns of ſtate at

home: I say, so long as we are exposed to these things, we must, every one of us, expect, in some degree or other, to bear a share in the miseries of the world.

And now, all these things considered, judge ye whether this world doth look like a place of rest; whether it is not rather a stage of calamities and sad events. Judge ye, whether the best of human things be not (as Solomon here tells us) *vanity*; but the worst of them, intolerable *vexation of spirit*.

8. Which will still appear the more evident, if, in the eighth and last place, we add this, namely, that tho' all we have hitherto said did go for nothing; tho' we could be supposed to be exempted from all those inconveniencies and mischiefs I have mentioned; tho' we could be supposed to be capable of an uninterrupted enjoyment of the good things of this life as long as we live; (which yet, you see, in the constitution of things, is impossible) yet even this would not satisfy much to the making our state in this world easy and happy; for there is one thing still would spoil all such hopes and pretences, and that is, the *fear of death*, which, as St. Paul truly observes, hath made mankind *all their life-time subject to bondage*, Heb. ii. 15. For a man to consider, that how happy and prosperous soever his circumstances are, yet he is mortal as well as other folks; he must, in a little time, die, as he sees his neighbours do, and leave all his comforts behind him; O what a dismal reflection must this needs be to a man who hath set up his rest in this world, and dreams of no other happiness but what he hath here! To think, that in a few years at the farthest, but possibly in a few months or days, (for no man knows how soon the

the time will come that God will call him) he ſhall lie down in the duſt, and then all that he hath here poſſeſſed and enjoyed, is loſt and gone, irrecoverably gone! Only there is his carriage and behaviour in this world, his virtues and his vices, his thoughts, and words, and actions that will go with him into the other world, and theſe muſt be ſeverely ſcann'd and accounted for! I ſay, for a man, that hath no other aims in this world, to conſider theſe things, how ungrateful, how tormenting muſt the thought of them be! What reſt, what peace can accrue to him from all the ſatisfactions of this life! This buſineſs of dying, and what is to come after it, is ſuch a bitter ſauce, ſuch a mixture of gall and wormwood to all a ſenſual man's enjoyments, that it is impoſſible to avoid the being miſerable under the apprehenſions of it.

O that we would ſeriouſly think upon theſe things! We ſhould certainly have this advantage by it, that we ſhould not any longer be cheated with the gaudy appearances of this world, but look after ſomething more ſolid, more ſubſtantial, than any thing we find here, to live for, to ſet our hearts and affections upon. We ſhould tremble to think of having received our good things in this life, and look upon ourſelves as moſt wretched forlorn creatures, if we had no farther hopes and expectancies. And this is the uſe for which I intended all this diſcourſe, which I beg leave a little to inſiſt upon, and then I conclude.

I have given you (you ſee) a picture, as well as I could draw it, of the ſtate of this preſent world, and the condition of that man, who looks no farther than it. And this, in order (as I told you at the beginning) to the ſhewing the folly and madneſs of placing our happineſs in any thing here to the neglect of hea-

ven and eternity. But I am ſenſible this account I have given will be apt to give offence to ſome. They will ſay, that all this declamation againſt the world, is little better than a libel againſt the divine providence. For what doth the repreſenting human life, as ſo imperfect, ſo dull, ſo miſerable an eſtate; what doth this mean, but to call the goodneſs and wiſdom of God into queſtion, ſince he might as eaſily have contrived it better?

I anſwer, no ſuch matter. There will appear no colour for this objection, if we would conſider that God ſeems on purpoſe to have framed this earthly ſtate ſo ſhort, and imperfect, and obnoxious to evils, as we find it, that we might not ſet our hearts upon it; that we might not think of fixing here, but ſhould eſteem ourſelves ſtrangers and pilgrims, and look up to him for an abiding and continuing city in another country. If God had intended that this world ſhould have been our dwelling-place for ever, he would certainly have ſo contrived the frame of it, and ſo have ordered all its affairs, and he would likewiſe have ſo ſuited our natures and faculties thereunto, that every good man, at leaſt, ſhould never have failed of enjoying all the ſatisfactions and happineſs here that he was capable of. But ſince God deſigned men for another and a more glorious place than this world, and ſent them hither only as probationers, or by way of trial, how they would uſe thoſe talents that he gave them, and in order to the fitting them for that glorious and eternal inheritance above; it was the greateſt kindneſs God could do us, not to make this world too tempting a place, but to exerciſe all that come into it with ſuch labours, and difficulties, and uneaſineſſes, that none, that hath his wits about him, may be fond

of it, but groan after thoſe eternal manſions that God hath provided for all good men in heaven. We come hither as into a ſchool, or place of exerciſe, that, by the ſevere diſcipline that is here uſed, we might be trained up and fitted for a glorious and immortal ſtate. So that it is for great good ends to us that we are no happier in this world, and conſequently it is no diſparagement to the goodneſs of God.

Others will be apt to quarrel with the deſcription I have given of the ſtate of this world, upon account that it is ſo melancholy and uncomfortable. This account of things (ſay they) takes away from us all poſſibility of any tolerable content or happineſs in this life.

But to them I anſwer, No, by no means, but only from thoſe perſons that expect no other ſtate but this, and therefore live in the world as if they were to live there always. Such men as theſe, I have ſufficiently ſhew'd, will always be miſerable in the beſt circumſtances of life, and therefore much more in the worſt ones. But there is a way of being very happy, very contented, nay, of perpetually rejoycing in this world. And that is, to ſit as looſe as we can from it: not to enſlave ourſelves to it; but to govern our affections, and appetites, and paſſions, by the rule of reaſon and the word of God: to remember that we were made for the enjoyment of God, and therefore to love him above all things, to place our hope, our confidence, our truſt, our dependance, our joy and comfort in him, and him only: to make it the buſineſs of our lives to approve ourſelves to him, by keeping a clear and unſpotted conſcience, by practiſing righteouſneſs, and ſobriety, and godlineſs in all our converſation: and laſtly, to caſt up our eyes continually to thoſe glorious rewards that our Saviour hath provided for us in the regi-

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ons above; ſo that heaven may have our hearts, our affections, while this world hath our bodies. If we frame our minds and lives according to theſe meaſures, we ſhall never be miſerable, let the world be as calamitous as it will. We ſhall be out of the reach of the common accidents and diſaſters of human life; that is to ſay, tho' they come upon us, yet they ſhall not harm or diſmay us. We ſhall have ſomething to ſupport us, and to bear up our ſpirits againſt every ruffle, every diſappointment, every thing that can come croſs to us. And, to conclude, as we ſhall enjoy abundance of peace and comfort in this world, tho' mixed with ſome uneaſineſs; ſo, when we come to die, we ſhall be the moſt glorious happy creatures that words can expreſs, or the mind of man conceive; for then we ſhall enter into that eternal reſt, *which God hath prepared for them that love him:* which that we may all do, God of his infinite mercy grant, *&c.*

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SERMON XVI.

Of making our Calling and Election sure.

2 PET. i. 10.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence, to make your calling and election sure.

IN treating on this text, I shall speak to these four points.

I. What is meant *by making our calling and election sure.*

II. How, or by what means, they are *to be made sure.*

III. What it is *to give all diligence to make them sure.*

IV. The great obligations that lie upon all of us *to give all diligence.*

I. I begin with the first point, what it is *to make our calling and election sure.*

And here we must first enquire what is meant by *our calling and election:* And then what it is *to make them sure.*

1. As for this word *calling*, it is generally used in the New-testament, to express that especial grace and mercy of God, by which men are brought to the belief and profession of Christ's religion. That this is the scripture notion of *calling*, would be easy to shew, by a particular enumeration of those texts where this word is used; but I shall only now mention two or three principal ones, which give light to this matter.

Ye see, brethren, (says St. Paul, 1 Cor. i. 26.) *your calling, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.* Where the being called is nothing else but the becoming christians. And the sense of the place is this, That however the rich, the great and worldly-wise men might have the gospel preached to them, and were invited to the christian profession, yet few of them did receive that invitation, or were effectually called, it being chiefly the poorer and humbler sort of men that gave in their names to Christ.

Thus again: Eph. iv. 1. *I beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation* (calling) *wherewith ye are called.* That is, in plain English, let your lives and conversations be suitable to that christian profession that God hath honoured you with.

Thus again, St. Paul affirms of all christians, of all that are within the pale of the church, that they are *called with an holy calling*, 2 Tim. i. 9. and that they *are partakers of the heavenly calling*, Heb. iii. 1. and lastly, in his language the *called* are those that are opposed to the infidels, whether they were Jews or Greeks, 1 Cor. i. 24.

We see by these passages, what is the notion of our *calling*; for as for the other term in my text, that *of election*, whatever that word may signify in other places,

places, yet here it seems to mean the same thing, in effect, with *calling*. If there be any difference between them, it is this, that our *calling* respects our being actually brought over to the belief of Christ's religion. Our *election* respects God's purposes and designs in conferring those privileges upon us long before we were in being. The latter word expresses God's eternal design of grace and mercy to us, in putting us into a condition of salvation by Jesus Christ. The former word expresses his actual execution of those designs, by actually bringing us in the course of his providence to the knowledge and belief of Christ Jesus.

This difference, I say, we may make between these words, if we will criticise upon them: but still, as I said, in effect, they come to the same thing. For whosoever is called of God, is also elected of God, in this sense of the word *elect*; and hence it is, that all christians, in opposition to pagans and infidels, are called *an elect generation*, 1 Pet. i. 9. just as all the Israelites, in opposition to the nations about them, are frequently in the Old-testament called *an elect people*.

It is true, there is in scripture another notion of the elect, than what I have now given, *viz.* where they are taken for those that not only enjoy the outward privileges of the gospel, but really walk worthy of them, and so are actually approved of God. Now to be elect in this sense, is something more than to be called; and in this sense it is that our Saviour is to be understood, when he tells us more than once, that *many are the called, but few are the elect or chosen*, Matt. xx. 16 xxii. 14. Which we are not to understand thus, Many are those that are called to be christians, but few are those that are decreed to be saved; (for tho' this sense may be orthodox, yet it doth not at

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all agree with the ſcope of our Saviour's words) but we are to underſtand his ſpeech thus, Many there are that come in at the call of the goſpel, and liſt themſelves among the number of the chriſtian profeſſors; but few are thoſe that live up to that profeſſion, and ſo are accepted and approved of God as worthy chriſtians.

But the being elect in this ſenſe, is not the *election* that my text here ſpeaks of. For this *election* is already made ſure and firm, by the ſincere obedience of the perſons ſo elected: But the *election* ſpoken of in my text, is ſuppoſed not yet to be ſo; but we are exhorted to make it ſo. It would be a vain thing for the apoſtle to bid us *give all diligence to make our election ſure*, if it was already ſure without our diligence.

II. And thus much of the notion and importance of thoſe terms *calling* and *election*. And from what has been ſaid concerning them, it will be eaſy to gather, in the ſecond place, what it is to make them ſure. For ſince by our calling and election is meant the free grace and favour of God in bringing us to the knowledge and profeſſion of his goſpel, and owning us for his own people, and as ſuch, deſigning us to glory and happineſs; the making of theſe ſure or firm, muſt be the taking care that we do not *receive this grace of God in vain*; but that it may really prove effectual to us, that is to ſay, that we may actually obtain the benefits that were intended us thereby, *viz.* the everlaſting ſalvation of our ſouls.

I know there are ſome that would give another account of *making our calling and election ſure*. They ſuppoſe that they are already ſure in the event; ſo that no man, who is called and elected, can finally loſe the benefits of them. But the apoſtle would have us further to make them ſure to ourſelves; that is, to uſe all

diligence

diligence to get ourselves assured that we are in the number of those that are called and elected to salvation; and that this is all that he meant by this exhortation. But, I think, this gloss is without any foundation; nay, is rather expressly contrary to the design of the apostle in this place. For it is plain, that he here speaks of such *a calling and election*, as that one, who is so called and elected, may yet fall away, and finally miscarry: else why doth he add in the next words, *If ye do these things, ye shall never fall*; which plainly implies, that if they did not do them, they might fall. Besides, the very words he here useth, will hardly bear such a construction as those persons would put upon it; for βεβαίαν ποιεῖν doth not signify to get ourselves assured of a thing, as they would have it, but to make a thing firm and sure; which is quite a different matter.

To this purpose therefore we may suppose St. Peter spoke to the christians in my text: Great, O christians, are the favours that God hath vouchsafed to you. He hath called you from the darkness of idolatry and superstition, *to the light of his glorious gospel*. Ye, who were once *not a people*, are now *the peculiar treasure of the Lord*. Ye, who were once the *children of wrath*, are now, *through faith in Christ Jesus, begotten again to the hope of an eternal inheritance among the sons of God. God hath chosen you out of the world*, to be his favourites here on the earth, and to crown you eternally in heaven. All these great things he hath done, and designed for you. But then you must remember, that there is something to be done on your part, in order to the effectually reaping the benefits of these privileges. These promises of God are made to you upon certain conditions; which conditions, if you do not perform, you may fail of obtaining them. Far

therefore

therefore be it from you to live at random, without taking any further thought, presuming on the favour of God, because you have the honour of being retainers to his Son. Far be it from you to be careless and unconcerned, as if indeed you were already secure of eternal happiness, because you have God's *calling and election* thereto. On the contrary, it will concern you to use your utmost care and diligence to qualify yourselves for the receiving the fruits and benefits of these mercies and favours of Christ Jesus, and by this means to render them firm and sure; that is to say, effectual to the good of your souls: which, indeed, otherwise will be so far from being advantages to you, that they will prove aggravations of your guilt and of your misery. For *how shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation*, as is brought to you by the Lord? Fear therefore, lest a promise being left you of entring into his rest, any of you fall short thereof. Give all imaginable diligence to make sure to yourselves those gracious designs of mercy that God had towards you, when he brought you to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And thus much of the first point, what it is to *make our calling and election sure.*

II. The next thing is to inquire how, or by what means this is to be done. Now as to that, the text itself will afford us a sufficient answer, if we will follow the reading of the vulgar Latin translation, and many likewise of the ancient Greek copies: for they read it thus; Wherefore the rather, my brethren, give all diligence by your good works to make your calling and election sure. Which reading doth indeed extremely well suit with what follows, *for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.* So that, according to this account, it is good works, or a course of virtuous actions, that must

secure

secure to us our calling and election. And this is a true and certain account of the matter, whether the text be to be read thus or no; for it may plainly be concluded from the apostle's discourse, both before and after the text, *If ye do these things* (says he) *ye shall never fall.* These things! What things? Why certainly either good works, as I said before, are here referred to; or, if that clause be not in the text, then those things that the apostle had just been speaking of in the verses before the text, must be here understood. Now what these were, you may see in the 5th verse; *and besides this*, says he, *giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins*, ver. 6, 7, 8, 9. And then follow the words of my text, *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence, to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; but an entrance shall be administred unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus*, ver. 10, 11. So that it is plain, from the apostle's discourse, that the things, by which we must make our calling and election sure, are no other than the things which he had been before recommending, *viz.* the *adding to our faith virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, charity*; in a word, all the fruits of a holy conversation. These are the things which *if we do, we shall never fall:* these are the things, upon our perform-

performance of which, *an entrance shall be administred unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus.* Faith alone will not do; but faith joined with universal obedience will; that is to say, a sincere and constant endeavour in all our thoughts, and words, and deeds, *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts: and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world*; this is that by which we must *make our calling and election sure.* And thus much of the second point.

III. The third thing is to inquire what is meant by giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure. Now this phrase doth certainly import thus much, *viz.* that we must shake off all sloth and idleness, and with great industry, and fervor, and activity, set ourselves upon the work.

We must not think that the eternal welfare of our souls can be secured by a few good thoughts or purposes, or now and then an act of repentance, or a fit of devotion, or some faint languid endeavours to be good. Alas! who ever succeeded in any worldly design without more diligence? Who ever got an estate, or attained to any compleat degree of learning or knowledge, but was more eager and industrious in the pursuit of it than this amounts to? And can we think that heaven and eternal happiness can be purchased at a less price than a small perishing good? Can we imagine that God will be so lavish of the greatest blessings he can bestow, that he will let them be earn'd with a less degree of application than will suffice to compass those blessings that he sets the least value upon, and which he vouchsafes often, in the course of his providence, to the worst of mankind?

No; if ever we mean to secure that inestimable treasure to ourselves, we must lay out our whole selves upon

upon it; it must have the first place in our esteem and in our affections: It must be the daily object of our thoughts, and desires, and meditations; we must hunger and thirst after it; we must study, and contrive, and take pains, all the ways we can, to get ourselves possessed of it. We must make it the great business and design of our lives, and not only a work by the by, a work to be dispatched at leisure hours, when we have nothing else to do; in a word, we must sell all we have to purchase it. This, I am sure, is that which our Saviour tells us, Matt. xiii. 4, 5. *The kingdom of heaven*, saith he, *is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.* And again he tells us, *That the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*, Matt. xi. 12. It is such a kingdom as cannot be enter'd, but by assault and storm; that is to say, it will require the utmost of our resolution, and vigour, and vigilance, and constancy, for the attaining of it.

There is another thing that seems to be implied in this phrase of giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure; and that is, a concernment and sollicitude about it, in opposition to presumption and vain confidence. He that useth that diligence about his salvation, that so weighty a matter calls for, will not, upon slight grounds and little appearances, think himself to have secured it, and so give over all further concern about it. On the contrary, he will be possessed with great apprehensions and anxiety, lest he should miscarry: he will be jealous over himself, lest he should not do his part towards the attaining of it; he will think all his care and thoughtfulness little enough to insure to himself so invaluable a blessing.

This

This is that temper of mind which the apoſtles do ſo often recommend to us, when they bid us *work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling*, Phil. ii. 12. When they bid us *not be high-minded, but fear*, Rom. xi. 20. When they bid us *ſerve God with reverence and godly fear*, Heb. xii. 28. When they bid us *paſs the time of our ſojourning here in fear*, 1 Pet. i. 17. Laſtly, when they bid us *fear, leſt a promiſe being left us of entring into reſt, any of us ſhould fall ſhort of it*, Heb. iv. 1. But, oh! how contrary to this is the method that ſome among us have taken up, who, inſtead of this religious *fear and trembling*, with which the apoſtles exhort us *to work out our ſalvation*, make it their buſineſs to free themſelves from all concern in this matter. They will not allow themſelves ſo much as to doubt of their ſalvation; or if at any time they do, they blame themſelves for it, and look upon it as a ſin, as an inſtance of their unbelief and want of faith; for they place their very title to heaven, in believing that they have a title to it. If they can but be perſuaded ſtrongly enough, that Chriſt died for them in particular, and that he fulfilled the law in their ſtead, and can but apply with confidence all his merits to themſelves, and reſt upon him alone for ſalvation, without any works of their own, they think they have done all that is required under the new covenant; and whoever talks of more, doth not underſtand the doctrine of free grace, as it is there held forth. But then St. Paul was ignorant of the free grace of the goſpel. Did not he underſtand the terms upon which we are to be ſaved? Yet ſee with what anxiety and ſollicitude he expreſſeth himſelf, even as to his own particular in this matter of his ſalvation: *If by any means*, ſays he, *I may attain to the reſurrection of the dead*, (that is, *of the juſt*) *not*

as

as tho' I had already attained, or were already perfect: but I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press forward towards the mark for the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus, Phil. iii. 11, 12, 13, 14. Thus doth the holy apostle declare his great concern and sollicitous care that he used for the saving his own soul, when yet undoubtedly he had already as much assurance of it, as any of us can now a-days pretend to: and if so much care was still necessary for him, will it not, at least, be as necessary for us? Shall we presume to think of our gaining the prize upon easier terms than he durst trust to? And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of our third general head in my proposed method.

IV. I come to the fourth and last, and that is, to stir you up to the practice of the apostle's exhortation in my text, *viz.* that you would *give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.*

Let me therefore, in the name of the Lord Jesus, call upon all of you, that have been hitherto negligent and careless in this matter, that you would now at least seriously set about it. As you love your souls, leave not this affair any longer at random: Do not sit down satisfied with the vain and uncertain hopes that you may do well enough hereafter, that you live in as good a condition as your neighbours, but with your whole might and strength apply yourselves to the working out that salvation, which God hath called and elected you to.

And

And in order hereunto, let me desire you seriously to think of what vast importance and concernment this business is to you. It is no trifling matter. It is not a thing that may be done, or left undone; but the happiness or misery of your whole life, and that to all eternity, depends upon it. The securing our future salvation is a concern truly infinite. All the other affairs we have to take care of in the world are but trifles to it. And ought not our care then and diligence in this matter to bear some proportion with the greatness of the concern we have in it? Is it not a wretched foolish part in us to be busy about small matters, to be earnest and unwearied in the pursuit of little designs, such as a little wealth, or pleasure, or the like, which, after a few years, will signify nothing at all to us, nor shall we be one jot the better for them, and to be altogether careless and negligent of that affair, by which we must be concluded either the most happy, or the most miserable, of all creatures for ever? To shew the extreme folly of this kind of temper, put the case that you had nothing in the world to concern yourselves about but only your body, would not every one count you mad, if they saw you taking mighty care for the cloathing or adorning some single limb, as for instance, your hand or your foot, and yet so regardless of the rest, as to leave them quite naked and exposed to all the inconveniencies of wind and weather? Or if they saw you extremely sollicitous about a scratch in your finger, and yet altogether unconcerned at a deep wound in your side, which, without speedy succour, might prove mortal to you? Why, in good earnest, every whit as foolishly and as unreasonably do you act, when, having an immortal soul to provide for as well as a body, you spend all your care upon this, and take no thought

for the other; when you think no pains too much for the preventing or getting rid of some small temporal inconveniency, that may affect your bodies, and yet will hardly employ a thought how you may escape the everlasting damnation both of your souls and bodies in hell-fire.

Ay, but, you will say, there is a great deal of difference between this life and that other, which you talk of. The one is present, and we are sure we must provide for the conveniencies of it, or else we are miserable; but the other life we know little or nothing of: however, it is at a great distance, and therefore we cannot be presumed to be so immediately concerned about it, especially when such a concernment will contribute nothing to our present enjoyments, but will rather disturb them. Give us the present, and let those that will take care of what is future.

Ay, but, my brethren, do we act thus in other cases? Have we not in all the purchases we make, in all the costs we lay out, nay, in all the projects we drive on in the world; have we not, I say, some regard to the time to come, as well as to the present? Certainly every wise man will consider his future condition, as well as that he is now in; and especially when it is such a condition as he must live in for ever, and that either extremely happily, or extremely miserably; whereas the life he now leads will be gone in a very few years at most: that which is now future, will some time be present, and shall we not have other thoughts when it comes to be so? Shall we not be of another mind when we come to die? Shall we not then sadly reflect upon our past carelessness of eternity, because, forsooth, it was then in futurity? Shall we not then wish we had been less sollicitous about our bodies and the affairs of

this world, and more minded the concernments of our ſouls? But neither indeed is the care of ſecuring our future happineſs ſo impertinent, or ſo inſignificant to our preſent life, as we make it. On the contrary, it hath a mighty great influence upon the comfortable enjoying of ourſelves in this world. He that hath taken all prudent care to ſecure his eternal eſtate, muſt needs lead an infinitely more eaſy, peaceful, and happy life, than they who do not. All the croſs accidents and misfortunes that happen to him (and God knows, no condition of life is free from them) are hereby ſweetned and made more ſupportable. He goes to his work, and minds his worldly buſineſs more chearfully; his enjoyments are more ſincere, and undiſturbed, and free from the allays of bitterneſs, and grief, and vexation: whereas the man that hath this great work ſtill lying upon his hands, the very fears and apprehenſions of what will come upon him hereafter, (which he cannot for his life rid himſelf of) will frequently diſquiet him, and render his condition, in the beſt of outward circumſtances, very troubleſome and uneaſy.

But what if this talk of ſalvation and damnation in another world be but a mere fable? What if there be no ſuch things, but they are only the dreams and fancies of melancholy people, or the fictions of crafty ſtateſmen and prieſts, the better to bring people under their government? Why ſhould we then be at any pains to deny ourſelves any preſent ſatisfaction for the ſake of them? Pray let us firſt ſee ſome demonſtration of the truth of theſe things.

Tho' I hope, there are no perſons profeſſing chriſtianity, that will talk at this rate; yet it is to be feared, that there are ſome, who in their hearts do much doubt of the truth of thoſe things we are ſpeaking of.

But

But to such persons, instead of offering them demonstrations to convince them (as indeed mattters of this nature are not capable of being demonstrated in a strict sense, tho' yet, I doubt not, there is such evidence to be given for them, as, in a considering man, will create as full and strong an assent, as if they were really demonstrable. I say, instead of offering them demonstrations) I shall only propose a question or two, to be seriously considered by them, before they abandon themselves to a total neglect and unconcernedness about their spiritual condition.

First, I would ask, Whether there be not some probability that these doctrines are true, *viz.* that there is another life after this; that there is a God, who will bring every man to account for his actions past, and reward him, or punish him, according to his good or evil life? Whether all the testimonies, drawn from the holy scriptures, the solemn declarations made by our Lord Jesus, who came down from heaven to ascertain us of these things, and the many miracles he wrought for the confirmation of them, his own visible resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven; as likewise the many arguments that may be drawn from the notions of our own minds, the justice of God's providence, and the consent of all nations, in all ages, and of all religions, Jews, Turks, Pagans, as well as Christians: I say, whether all these do not at least amount to a probability that these things are true? Now, if it be confessed that these things are probable, will any man in his wits think it reasonable to live as if he was certain there was no such thing? Must he not rather conclude, that it is really his wisest way to do his endeavours to secure his own share of that future happiness, and to avoid the punishments

that ſhall then come upon wicked men, ſince he acknowledgeth that it is likely, that it is probable, there will come a time of ſuch happineſs and ſuch puniſhments?

But, ſecondly, if this be too much, if it will not be granted that there is ſo much as a probability in theſe things, I would only deſire to know, whether it is poſſible they ſhould be true. This, ſure, the moſt impudent atheiſt in the world will not deny: or if he doth, he muſt ſhew that it implies a contradiction they ſhould be true, that they have in them a plain repugnancy to the common principles of reaſon, which ſure none will affirm.

If now it be but granted that it is poſſible there ſhould be another life after this, wherein virtuous religious men ſhall be for ever happy, and the ſenſual, the wicked, the profane, for ever tormented: I ſay, Is it not a man's intereſt that he ſhould provide accordingly? Would not a man, in common prudence, take ſome pains to ſecure his intereſt in that ſtate; and doth he not run a deſperate riſque if he do not? For tho' it were odds there was no ſuch ſtate, yet what if there ſhould prove one? What a condition were the man in then?

It is true, in other caſes, where things are not likely to come to paſs, we do not often think it reaſonable to make proviſions againſt them. But here the caſe is of ſuch a nature, is of ſuch vaſt, unſpeakable, infinite importance to us, that the very poſſibility of its happening ſhould, in all reaſon, put a man upon the uſing of means for the preventing hazards, eſpecially when the means that are to be uſed are ſuch as will not in the leaſt make his preſent life more uncomfortable, or deprive him of any true real pleaſure, or convenience,

or

or satisfaction: But, on the contrary, as I said before, will increase his happiness even in this world. Tho' there was no heaven, no hell, a man loseth nothing that lives as if there were, but is rather a gainer by it: but if there should prove a heaven and a hell, a man loseth infinitely that lives not a religious life, for he is damned to all eternity.

Thus you see, that tho' we were even infidels, and did not believe another world, yet it would concern us to live as if there was.

But oh! how must this concernment be increased, when it is not only possible, nay, when it is not only highly probable, but when it is absolutely certain that all these things are true! that there *is verily a reward for the righteous*, that there is a hell for the wicked, and that there is a *God that judgeth the earth*. And that all this is so, we may be as certain, as we are certain that we shall all die: and when that time comes (as how shortly and suddenly it may come, we know not) good Lord, in what a condition shall we be, if we have made no provision for our eternal state!

Oh therefore, my brethren, let us trifle no longer! let us squander away no more of our precious time in idleness, or pleasure, or sensuality, or a course of worldly business, to the neglect of our immortal souls, and their everlasting interests; but let us presently enter upon our great work; the *working out our own salvation, the making our calling and election sure*, by breaking loose from all our sins that hold us in captivity, and seriously giving up ourselves to the service of God in all those ways which Jesus Christ hath chalked out to us, *adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness*

brotherly-kindneſs and charity; *knowing*, *that if we do theſe things we ſhall never fall, but an entrance will be miniſtred to us abundantly into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*: To which God of his infinite mercy bring us all, for the ſake of the ſame his dear Son.

To whom, &c.

SER-

SERMON XVII.

Of the circumcision of the Heart.

ROM. ii. 28, 29.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.

FOR the understanding the sense of these words, and what use we are to make of them, we must look back to what the apostle has been discoursing in this and the former chapter. His design in both these chapters, is to set forth the great degeneracy and corruption that all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, lay in, both as to their manners and principles; and consequently the necessity of God's setting on foot a new dispensation, in order to the reformation and salvation of men, and

that was the faith of Jesus Christ, without which it was impossible, either for Jew or Gentile, to plead a title to God's mercy.

He begins with the Gentiles, and shews largely how horribly blind and ignorant they were in the matters of God; how false and superstitious their religion and worship; and to what an height of wickedness and impiety, as to their practices, they were arrived, so that they were altogether inexcusable before God.

But it might be said, the Jews were not in this deplorable condition: they were not strangers to the true God, nor ignorant of his worship. God had made known his will to them by a revelation from heaven, and had adopted them for his own children. And they bore the mark of their being in covenant with him in their very flesh, besides abundance of other advantages that they had above all the world. So that they had great reason to believe themselves safe, whatever became of the Gentiles. Those poor people indeed they owned to be in a wretched state; but as for themselves, who were the people of God, and were able to teach his will to all the rest of the world, they sure could not be in danger of miscarrying.

This was the plea that the Jews made for themselves, and it is handsomly represented by St. Paul, in the 7th verse of this second chapter, where he begins to apply his discourse to them.

Behold, says he, *thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light to them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of the simple, having the platform of truth and knowledg*

knowledge of the law, ver. 18, 19, 20. All this the Jews ſaid of themſelves: and St. Paul doth not deny but that they might ſay it, both with truth and reaſon. But what then? Were they therefore in a better condition, as to their ſpiritual everlaſting ſtate, than thoſe poor heathens whom they ſo much deſpiſed? No; he tells them plainly, in no wiſe, but rather far more inexcuſable, foraſmuch as they did not make a right uſe of this light and knowledge that God had afforded them above all other nations. This law, that they ſo much gloried in, had no influence upon their hearts and lives. They lived as lawleſly as if God had never revealed his will to them. Their practices were quite contradictory to their pretences and profeſſion; and this their own conſciences could not but reproach them with, and condemn them for. For what greater reproach can there be to a man, or what can more aggravate his guilt, than for him to pretend to be able *to teach others, and yet not to teach himſelf? To preach that a man ſhould not ſteal, and yet to ſteal himſelf? To abhor idols and all idolatrous worſhip*, and yet to be guilty of as great impiety againſt God another way, viz. *committing of ſacrilege? To make his boaſt of the law, and yet to diſhonour God*; nay, and *to make his name blaſphemed among the very* Gentiles, (ver. 21, 22, 23, 24) by his open and ſcandalous violations of that law? And yet this was the caſe of the Jews, as St. Paul chargeth it upon them in the 2d verſe of this chapter, and the four following.

And then, as for the buſineſs of circumciſion, which they laid ſo mighty a ſtreſs upon, as that which was the ſeal of their covenant with God, and that which entitled them to his mercies and favour, he tells them in the 25th verſe, that *their circumciſion would indeed*

profit them if they kept the law; but if they were transgressors of the law, their circumcision was made uncircumcision; that is to say, that circumcision was indeed a sacrament instituted by God for the entring that people into covenant with him, and for the sealing and conveying the benefits made over by that covenant to all those that were circumcised: But then it was upon this supposition, upon this condition, that those who were so circumcised, did perform the terms which that covenant required of them; that is to say, did live in the practice of inward purity and holiness, and obedience to God's commandments, which were the things signified by circumcision. But if they did not this, they were so far from reaping any spiritual benefits by their circumcision, that they had as good *not have been circumcised at all* (that is the meaning of his phrase of their *circumcision being made uncircumcision*, ver. 25.) Nay, as he goes on in the next verse, (26.) the heathens themselves, if they lived better than the Jews, if they were more pure and holy, (27.) and more obedient to the laws of God written in their hearts, than the Jews were, tho' they had no circumcision in their flesh, yet were they, in a true sense, more properly Jews, that is to say, more truly children of Abraham, and entitled to the promises of God, and the benefits of the covenant made with him, than the carnal Jews, who had the mark of circumcision upon them. For, as he concludes in the words of my text, *He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God*, ver. 28, 29. As if he had said, Every one that is born a Jew, and is circumcised, and,

as

as far as the outward characters and badges of Judaism go, can make a fair title to the promises of God, is not therefore a true Jew, is not therefore a son of Abraham, to whom the benefits of God's covenant do appertain; nor is that the true available circumcision, which is external, that mark which is imprinted on the flesh: but he is the Jew, the Israelite indeed, the true child of Abraham, who shall be accepted of God, tho' he be not so by birth; who, in the purity and integrity of his heart, yields obedience to those eternal and substantial laws of holiness and righteousness which God gave to the Jews: and the true circumcision, that will stand one in stead, is that of him who cuts off all superfluities and pollutions that are spiritual; who hath that law of righteousness, of which circumcision is the sign and seal, imprinted on his inner man, his soul and spirit: Not he who hath obeyed it in the letter only, by being circumcised outwardly in his flesh. In a word, the true Israelite is one, *whose praise is not of men, but of God*; who aims at more in his profession of religion, than barely the entitling himself to the favour, and countenance, and outward privileges which that profession may procure him among men; for he makes it his main business to approve himself to God by a serious endeavour in thought, and word, and deed, to observe his holy commandments.

Thus I have given you a plain account of St. Paul's discourse in this chapter, and of the sense and meaning of the words of my text.

But it may be said, What doth all this concern us? We are neither Jews nor Gentiles, but Christians, and therefore have nothing to do with what the apostle here discourseth concerning them.

I answer, tho' the apostle here particularly addresseth his discourse to the Jews, yet the reason of his words is of eternal truth in all religions, and doth concern us as well as them. For do but change the word Jew in the text into that of Christian, and the term of circumcision into that of baptism, and those other outward duties and privileges which we (and yet not without great reason) do set so high a value upon, and the text will fit us at this day, as well as those persons to whom St. Paul did immediately direct his discourse. The truth is, it is to be fear'd, that many of us christians do approach too near to the Jews of that time in our notions of religion, and think ourselves true disciples of Christ, and to have a right to all the promises of the gospel upon the same, or no better grounds, than those Jews that St. Paul here disputes against, thought themselves the children of Abraham, and entitled to all the benefits of that covenant which was made with him. For as they believed themselves secure of God's favour and acceptance, merely because they were Jews outwardly, that is, had all the external visible characters of Judaism upon them; so do we too often presume upon an outward christianity, which how speciously soever it looks, nay, tho' we ourselves are imposed upon by it, (as thinking it will serve all our ends) yet is it indeed rather in the flesh, than in the spirit; and the praise of it is more of men, than of God.

It will, I hope, be worth the while to run over the several heads or instances of this outward Judaism, the particulars that the Jews in St. Paul's time rested so much upon: And to see how exactly the principles of many mens christianity among us do answer to them. For from this it will appear how much we are concern'd to have a care of such principles, and to take other

other kinds of meaſures of religion; unleſs we mean to be content with the ſhadow of it inſtead of the ſubſtance, and will build our hopes of heaven upon an airy and fantaſtic foundation.

I. I begin with that branch of outward Judaiſm, which St. Paul doth ſo much inſiſt on, viz. *their placing their confidence in being the natural ſeed of* Abraham, *and being circumciſed, and having the true religion and worſhip of God among them.* Which privileges gave them ſo great an opinion of themſelves, that they deſpiſed all the world beſides; nay, they verily thought, that in virtue of thoſe outward advantages they ſhould certainly be ſaved, let them lead what lives they would. It was a known maxim among them, and is ſtill extant in their books, that every Iſraelite, if he continue ſo to his life's end, hath his portion in the kingdom of God. Nothing but apoſtacy from the faith, could deprive him of it. So great a value they thought God had for the merits of their father Abraham, that for his ſake he would not ſuffer any of his ſeed to periſh (meaning that ſeed which was promiſed by Iſaac and Jacob.) And it is this notion of theirs that St. John Baptiſt doth refer to, and tacitly reprove in that ſpeech of his to the Jews, when they came to his baptiſm; *Bring forth*, ſays he, *fruits meet for repentance, and think not to ſay within yourſelves, We have* Abraham *to our father.* (They thought that that alone would preſerve them from the wrath to come.) No, ſays he, *for God is able even of theſe ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham*, Matt. iii. 8, 9.

But now, tho' one would think this ſhould be ſo groundleſs a preſumption, that none but a conceited Jew ſhould be guilty of it, yet, in truth, do many among us ſupport ourſelves, and build our hopes of God's

favours upon the very same, or no better a foundation. I pray what great difference is there (I speak as to the inward virtue or merits of the thing) between being natural-born Jews and children of Abraham, and being born of christian parents? Between an outward circumcision, and an outward baptism? Between an external profession of the law of God given by Moses, and an external profession of the gospel of Christ? And yet are there not too many of us, that hope and expect to be saved merely on account of these things? Ask several persons upon what it is that they ground the hopes of God's favour, and what title they can plead to the pardon of their sins: why, the best answer they can make, is, They thank God they are not infidels, but born and bred in a christian country: they were baptized into Christ, and are members of an orthodox church, where religion is professed in its purity, and they have never departed from this profession, but believe as their teachers would have them; and therefore they doubt not of a right to all those promises that Christ hath made to his church.

Far I am here from denying, much more from slighting or undervaluing the great advantages of being born and educated in such a country as ours. I own with all my heart, not only the expediency, but also the absolute necessity of baptism, and a visible profession of the christian religion. These are things, without which we cannot be saved, in an ordinary way. And, I bless God most unfeignedly, and so, I hope, do we all, for the unspeakable mercy he hath vouchsafed to us of this kingdom, in having the gospel of Christ, and the worship of God more purely taught, and more sincerely administred among us, than in most parts of Christendom; and therefore infinite are our blessings and privi-

leges

leges above what the heathen world hath any notion of. But then, for any of us to reſt upon theſe things, and to think ourſelves good chriſtians, and heirs of ſalvation, becauſe it is our lot to be born and educated in ſuch happy circumſtances, without taking any care ourſelves to make a good uſe of them, is juſt the folly of a man, that, being born to a good eſtate, riotouſly ſpends it all, and yet thinks to die rich. Happy are we that we were baptized in our infancy, and trained up to the profeſſion of a holy religion. And woe be to us, if we trifle away theſe mercies of God, and abuſe that grace which was given us for our improvement in all chriſtian virtues, to the purpoſe only of a vain preſumption of God's favour, without contributing our moſt earneſt endeavours to our being qualified for it. Baptiſm and the profeſſion of an holy religion, are moſt unſpeakable bleſſings; but yet they were not granted us, or required of us for themſelves, or that we ſhould reſt upon them alone, but for further ends, *viz.* that we might be obliged hereby to forſake the devil and all his works, the vanities of the world, and the ſinful luſts of the fleſh, and follow the example of our Lord, into whoſe diſcipline we were baptized, by dying daily to ſin, and living unto righteouſneſs. If we do not make this uſe of our baptiſm and viſible profeſſion, they will ſignify nothing at all to us. To conclude this head, we may truly ſay of theſe things what St. Paul here in this chapter ſaid of circumciſion, and thoſe other Jewiſh privileges that he is here talking of, viz. *that they do verily profit, if thou keep the law of Chriſt: but if thou be a tranſgreſſor of that law, thy Baptiſm is no baptiſm, thy Chriſtianity is no better than heathenſm. For he is not a Chriſtian that is one outwardly, neither is that Baptiſm which is outward upon*

the flesh; but he is a Christian that is one inwardly, and Baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not only that according to the letter of the Gospel.

II. Another principle of outward Judaism, (as I may call it) in which the pharisees and other Jews in St. Paul's time were apt to rest (and which was indeed a degree higher than the former instance I mentioned) was their being skilful in the knowledge of their law. This our apostle in this chapter takes notice of, when, reckoning up those things that the Jews had so great a value for in themselves, he names their *having a form of knowledge, and being able to be guides of the blind, and instructors of the ignorant, and teachers of babes*, ver. 19, 20. And indeed, such was the genius of that people at that time, that by how much any of them did exceed in knowledge and skilfulness about the mysteries of their law, and the traditions of their fore-fathers, by so much the better Jews they took themselves to be, and the more acceptable to God; and by so much the more they despised their neighbours that were inferior to them in this kind of knowledge. And hence came that great conceit the pharisees and scribes had of themselves, and the great contempt that, upon all occasions, they expressed of others: *This people*, say they, *that knoweth not the law, are cursed*, as you find them speaking in St. John's gospel, John vii. 49. Hence it came, that instead of practising the law in their lives, their whole study was taken up in speculations about it, in finding out subtilties, and mysteries, and curiosities, that were above the capacities of ordinary persons; in which matter we have at this day extant in their writings abundance of instances of their diligence.

And are there not just such a sort of christians among us? Are there not some in our days that make christianity

anity little more than a buſineſs of mere ſpeculation, or a ſet of orthodox opinions, or a more than ordinary knowledge of the myſteries of God? Are there not too many, who read the word of God indeed, nay, and perhaps, with a great deal of care, if not niceneſs and curioſity, but yet by no means with an intent to better their lives thereby, by no means to regulate their judgments in any points of faith, or their manners in any points of practice; but merely for the confirming them in ſome notion they have taken up, or the eſtabliſhing ſome doctrine, that the party they are engaged in are oblig'd to maintain? Others, I am afraid, may ſtudy the ſcriptures to another purpoſe, which is altogether as unaccountable; that is to ſay, merely for the ſake of the phraſe and language they there meet with; which, when they are well acquainted with, they do ſo wretchedly miſapply in their religious talk, that, in truth, what is admirable ſenſe and reaſon in the holy books, is little better than jargon and cant, when it comes out of their mouths. With theſe men to be a good chriſtian, is to be able to diſpute learnedly about articles of faith, and to be wonderfully orthodox in their opinions, and to have ſo great a knowledge in the points that are now controverted among chriſtians, that they can enter the liſts for the cauſe they have eſpouſed againſt any adverſary that oppoſes them. With others of them, chriſtianity runs much lower, for it is but talking warmly and zealouſly in ſcripture phraſe and language about matters they never gave themſelves much trouble to underſtand; and then who can doubt of their love to God, and their zeal for Jeſus Chriſt?

The men that have theſe talents, are apt to think meanly enough of thoſe that have them not. Thoſe plain ſimple chriſtians, that heartily believe their creed,

and

and endeavour to live honeſtly among their neighbours, and ſerve God as well as they can, but yet trouble not themſelves with thoſe high points of ſpeculation, nor with the diviſions of Chriſtendom, this ſort of men (God help them) are, in their opinion, but poor weak chriſtians, too much under the diſpenſation of morality, and not yet arrived to the ſaving knowledge of Jeſus Chriſt.

But ſure this ſort of principles, and theſe notions of religion, wherever they are found, are but a branch of the old phariſaiſm. Theſe kind of men that I have deſcribed, how knowing ſoever they are in the myſteries of God, are but Jews, I ſhould ſay, *Chriſtians outwardly, and their praiſe is of men, and not of God.* The true inward chriſtianity ſinks down into the heart, is a vital principle there of all holy and good actions, makes a man a new creature, and ſubdues every thing in him that ſpeaks oppoſition to the holy diſcipline of our Lord Jeſus; but was never intended to flutter above in the brain, and to fill his head with notions and ſpeculations, and there to leave him, with his affections and inclinations, as deeply engaged to the world, and the fleſh, and the devil, as ever they were before. O this is the worſt repreſentation of chriſtianity that can be! *They are not the hearers of the law* (ſays St. Paul, Rom. ii. 13.) *but the doers of it, that ſhall be juſtified.* And *if you know theſe things* (ſays our Saviour, John xiii. 17.) *happy are ye if ye do them.* And whatever knowledge of Chriſt any of us may pretend to above our neighbours, yet *hereby* (ſays St. John, 1 John ii. 3, 4.) *we know that we know him if we keep his commandments. But he that ſaith he knows him and keepeth not his commandments, is a lyar, and the truth is not in him.*

III.

III. Another piece of outward Judaiſm, which the ſcripture often takes notice of, was, *the having an extraordinary zeal for things that were in themſelves indifferent, and were not commanded of God, and making it a weighty point of religion to obſerve or abſtain from thoſe things.* The Jews, and eſpecially the phariſees, placed a great deal of their religion in theſe matters. *They loved their own traditions* (as our Saviour tells us, Mark vii. 7, 8, 9.) *more than God's commandments.* What a world of ſtir and buſtle did they make about their phylacteries? (which were certain ſcrolls of parchment, with certain texts of ſcripture written upon them, that they tied upon their fore-heads, whenever they ſaid their prayers.) There was no law of God for them (unleſs they forced ſome proverbial allegorical expreſſion in the law to ſpeak a literal ſenſe, which was not intended;) but yet, as our Saviour reproves them, they were abundantly more careful to have thoſe phylacteries about them, tied on their heads, than to have the law of God written upon their hearts.

What a matter of conſcience did they make of cleanſing cups and platters, and waſhing their hands before meat? Inſomuch, as the text tells us, *they marvelled to ſee our Saviour and his diſciples to ſit down to meat with unwaſhed hands*, Matt. xv. 1. Mark vii. 2. And abundance of other inſtances there is to be given of their zeal in matters of this nature.

We now, that are chriſtians, and know better things, are apt enough to deride the fooliſh ſuperſtitions of thoſe people in thoſe days: but are not we ourſelves, many of us, as fooliſhly ſuperſtitious? If we will go over to our neighbour nations, where the popiſh religion is profeſſed, we ſhall there ſee inſtances in abundance tranſcending, I verily believe, the very height

of

of the phariſaic ſuperſtition. Good Lord! what ſtreſs is there laid upon the adoring the croſs of our Lord, and reſorting to the images of our lady, and other ſaints! And, which is wonderful, all croſſes and all images are not of like virtue, but ſome better ſerve the neceſſities of devout adorers than others do! What a meritorious thing is it to ſay ſo many *Ave Maria*'s, and ſo many Lord's prayers every day, according to the number of their ſtring of beads! What a ſecurity do they account a ſlight penance and the prieſts abſolution, againſt all the malignity and guilt of their moſt mortal ſins! How ſafe do they think they are from danger, if they have any relicks or conſecrated things about them! Nay, in the very point of death, an indulgence purchaſed with their money, or a putting on the habit of ſome religious brother, to the patron of whoſe ſociety they have devoted themſelves, is ſuch a mighty comfort, that they can die in peace!

What is ſuperſtition, if this be not? Is not this plainly to place religion in voluntary and uncommanded performances? Pray wherein do theſe ſorts of things exceed the phariſees phylacteries, or their waſhing of hands, or cleanſing of cups and platters?

But are not ſome among ourſelves guilty of this phariſaiſm, as well as our neighbours? I would to God we would lay this matter to heart. We all pretend to hate ſuperſtition extremely. God give us all grace to hate it more, for it is an ill thing wherever it is found. But, in good earneſt, is it not as great a piece of ſuperſtition, to make it a matter of religion and conſcience, to forbear the uſe of an indifferent thing when God hath not forbid the uſe of it, as it is to make it a matter of religion and conſcience to uſe an indifferent thing when God hath not commanded it? I dare ſay every

every one living will be satisfied that there is no difference between these cases, as to the matter of superstition.

But now, if this be so, what must we say of all those persons that refuse communion with us, as to our prayers and our sacraments, merely upon this account, that there are some things in our worship that are not commanded by God, tho' yet they cannot deny but that they are indifferent in themselves, and that they are commanded by the laws of the land. Let those that are concerned apply this to themselves: And, on the other side, I will say this to those of our communion, If any of them think to recommend themselves to God, merely by a conformity to the gestures, and habits, and forms prescribed by the church in the worship of God, without any inward devotion, or a serious endeavour after a thorough sanctification of body, and soul, and spirit, they are as much devoid of the life of God, as much outward hypocritical professors, Jews or Christians, call them which you will, as any I have now represented.

But there is another sort of people among us that ought not to be forgotten, when we are mentioning this pharisaical principle of placing religion in things wherein God hath not interposed his command: There are, we know, some among us, that distinguish themselves from the neighbourhood by a particular way of their own, both in their habit, in their speech, in their gestures, in their way of address, in all their conversation. You will easily guess what sort of people I mean. And these singularities they take up upon account of conscience, and place some religion in them. Now, if it be so (and if it be not so, why do not they leave these ridiculous practices?)

I say, if it be so, where is the difference between them and the papists; nay, and the pharisees, as to this point? How is their *yea* and *nay*, their refusal of the hat, and twenty such like things, more excusable than the papists holy water, and crosses and pilgrimages, or in the pharisees phylacteries, and *praying in the corners of the streets?*

The sum of all this head is this, That let us be of what religion, what communion we will, yet if we can give no better evidence of our sincerity, than it was only a zealous practice or forbearance of indifferent things, we are but under the character that is here given in my text of being Jews or christians *outwardly, and our praise is more of men, than of God.*

IV. Another branch of outward Judaism was, a greater zeal for rituals and ceremonials, tho' of God's own appointment, than for the moral duties of the law. This was a main point of the Jewish falsely-pretended religion in those days, and occasioned many excellent discourses, both of the prophets, and of our Saviour, and of the apostles. Very punctual they were in observing all the positive ceremonial precepts of the law concerning the worship of God. But thinking these things to be sufficient to make compensation for all other licentious practices they might indulge themselves in, they took no care to observe those laws that were of inward substantial goodness. They tithed mint and cummin; which things, as our Saviour saith, *they ought to do*, as being commanded by the law; but they made no conscience of *justice, and mercy, and faith, which things they ought much rather to have done*, Matt. xxiii. 23. They were very frequent in fasting and praying. Pray they did in *the very corners of the streets*, Matt. vi. 5. And the pharisee, that our Saviour

viour mentions, *fasted twice a week*; Luke xviii. 12. which, to be sure, was there set down for an imitation of the practice of that religious sort of men. But yet, in their prayers *they honoured God with their lips, when their hearts were far from him*, Matt. xv. 8. And in their fasts *they did not cease from their works of violence and iniquity*, as the prophet testifies against them. They were zealous observers of the sabbath, but did not rest from their wicked works. They were very free to *offer sacrifices to God of their herd, and of their flock, even till he declared that he was cloyed with them, and his soul hated them.* But they were not so free to offer to him their inward man, their hearts and spirits, which was the only sacrifice he delighted in.

Now I heartily wish it were well considered, whether we also at this day do not frequently thus play the Jews with God Almighty. I fear there is some reason to believe, that a great many of us are leavened with those very principles and notions of religion; I mean, that we are very zealous for, and lay a mighty stress upon those duties that concern the outward worship of God, but are not proportionably zealous for the inward spiritual acts of piety (that heavenly frame and temper of mind that can alone recommend us to God) nor for the duties that are next under it; I mean, that universal righteousness, goodness and charity, that is due to our fellow-creatures. Hath not the world experience of some, who would not, for any consideration, swear an oath in their ordinary conversation, (and in that they are highly to be commended) that yet will make no scruple of using very indirect arts for the promoting their own interests, (I will call it by no heavier a name) when they have a fair opportunity offered them? There are those, who are very

strict

ſtrict in keeping the Lord's Day, and attending the public ordinances of that day; but yet they are not ſo ſtrict in keeping faith and truſt, and preſerving their minds from all inward pollutions of worldlineſs and ſenſuality. It is not unuſual to find thoſe men in the world, that do, at ſolemn times, receive the ſacrament with as great devotion as is poſſible (and that is the moſt ſerious and ſolemn act of our worſhip) and yet, within a very little time after (perchance upon the firſt temptation) return to the ſame ſins they religiouſly vow'd againſt, and ſo continue on in that courſe of life.

In naming of theſe things, I reflect upon no particular perſon in the world; for I am ſure I think of none, and therefore can mean none. But, I doubt, the matter of fact is true as to all thoſe particulars; and therefore what muſt we ſay of the perſons that are concerned in it? I dare not ſay, that ſuch perſons are hypocrites in the uſual ſenſe of the word, becauſe it is very probable they do not perform thoſe duties merely for a ſhew, but are in good earneſt, and verily believe that theſe things alone are ſufficient to the attaining of God's favour, and the entitling them to the pardon of their ſins, and everlaſting happineſs in the world to come; though they continue to indulge themſelves in ſuch wicked ſinful practices, as their own conſciences cannot but continually ſmite, and reprove, and condemn them for. Such notions men may have got concerning religion, and the terms of ſalvation offered by Jeſus Chriſt in his goſpel. But though I will not call them hypocrites, that is to ſay, diſſemblers either with God or man, yet, I think, we ought to call them outward phariſaical chriſtians, that are utterly devoid of the life and ſpirit of that religion they do profeſs.

profeſs. I do not blame them, but commend them, for the performing thoſe duties that they do; and I believe, if they had not this reſpect for the outward worſhip of God, they would, in a little time, grow extravagantly and enormouſly wicked. But yet they are exceedingly to be blamed (and if they do not amend their lives, they will blame themſelves to all eternity) in that, to their outward ſervices they pay to God, they do not add an intire reſignation of the inward man, their whole ſouls and ſpirits to be abſolutely ruled and governed by thoſe laws of purity and holineſs, that are preſcribed to them in the goſpel. Without this intire devotion of our whole ſelves to God, all our ſervices will be little better than hypocriſy: but with it all our frailties, and faults, and infirmities, how many ſoever they be, will be forgiven us; and notwithſtanding them, we ſhall find favour with our heavenly Father, thro' our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

Thus I have given you an account of the outward Jew, that St. Paul ſpeaks of, and ſhewed you how very much many of our chriſtian profeſſors do reſemble him in their principles and practices; which was the thing I propoſed.

And now it will be very needleſs to enter into a deſcription of the perſon that St. Paul in the text oppoſeth to him, *a Jew inwardly, whoſe circumciſion is that of the heart, and whoſe praiſe is not of men, but of God.* For we may eaſily form a notion of ſuch a perſon by what has been ſaid of the other. Let us but affix the directly contrary qualities to him, and then we have his character. However, to ſave you the trouble of collecting it, I will give you the heads of thoſe things, that go to the making up his deſcription.

1. Firſt of all, the inward Jew, or he that is ſuch an Iſraelite as our Saviour ſpeaks of, *an Iſraelite in-*

deed, in whom there is no guile, John i. 47. or, to speak in our own language, a true disciple of Christ: he is, I say, a person, who is so far from vaunting himself, or resting in the outward privileges he enjoys, that he draws from hence an argument of working out his salvation with greater fear and trembling, knowing, that by how much the greater advantages he enjoys above others, by so much the greater obligations are laid upon him to out-strip them in virtue and holiness: so as that if he do not improve those mercies and favours of God to the right purposes, he is in a worse condition than those who never had them.

2. Secondly, he is a person tractable and docible; one that hath quitted his mind of all its sinful prejudices and pre-possessions, so that he is always prepared to receive and entertain any truth of God, tho' convey'd to him by mean instruments, and tho' never so disagreeable to his sensual delights and interests.

3. Thirdly, he is a person that doth not overvalue some duties and lessen others, but gives every duty to God its due and just place in his esteem, preferring inward acts of piety before the outward service of God, yet not omitting that; and so ordering his devotions towards God, that they are instrumental to, and great promoters of, the duties he owes to his neighbour.

4. Fourthly, he is a person who endeavours to yield an universal obedience to the laws of God, not picking and chusing out of them those to observe, that are easiest and least repugnant to his nature and interests, and laying less stress upon the rest; but doing what he can to observe them all. Not contenting himself only to observe them in his outward actions, but endeavouring to bring his mind and spirit to a conformity with them, labouring to regulate his thoughts, desires and appetites by them, as well as his conversation.

5.

5. Fifthly, he is a perſon that ſeeks not, deſigns not the praiſe of men in any thing he doth, but hath a mighty care to approve himſelf to God. It is the conſcience of his duty that is the great ſpring and principle from whence his actions proceed, and the hinge on which they turn. So that he is always of a piece, always like himſelf; as religious and devout in private, as in public; as careful of himſelf and his actions when no body ſees him, as when he hath many ſpectators and obſervers of his carriage.

6. Sixthly and laſtly, he is a perſon that, when he hath done all, is yet humble and lowly in his own eyes, not pretending to merit any thing at the hand of God. On the contrary, if he had done his whole duty, all that God hath required of him (which yet he is far from being ſo vain as to think he hath) yet he is ſenſible that *ſtill he is an unprofitable ſervant*; he hath done God no good, *he hath only done what he ought to do*, Luke xvii. 10. And therefore far be it from him to think he deſerves any thing at the hands of God; nay, he rather deſires to lay down in the duſt, and, from the bottom of his heart, to aſcribe all that he hath, and all that he is, and all that he hopes for, to his ſole grace, favour and goodneſs, crying out with holy *David*, *Not unto me, Lord, not unto me, but unto thy holy name be the praiſe and the glory of all*, Pſal. cxv. 1.

He that hath theſe characters upon him, is certainly an Iſraelite indeed, a true Nathanael, one that is beloved of God, and ſhall inherit the promiſes both of this life, and that which is to come. Now that we may all be ſuch, and conſequently be ſo happy, God of his infinite mercy grant, *&c.*

SERMON XVIII.

Explanation of the following Text.

ACTS xiii. (latter part of ver. 48.)

And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.

THIS text having ſome affinity with thoſe I have lately been upon, as to the argument of it, and it being likewiſe commonly miſunderſtood, I thought it would not be unacceptable to have a fair account given of it: And I am the more deſirous to do it, becauſe ſeveral uſeful things offer themſelves from it.

You find, in the 14th verſe of this chapter, that St. Paul and his company being come to Antioch in Piſidia, he went, as it was his cuſtom, into the ſynagogue on the ſabbath-day; where, both Jews and Gentiles were gathered together. There he preached a ſermon to them, to perſuade to the belief of Chriſt Jeſus, whom, by undeniable arguments, he proved to be that Meſſias, whom God had promiſed to the fathers, and by whom only remiſſion of ſins and everlaſting

lasting salvation was to be had. This sermon of his is set down in this chapter from ver. 16, to 42.

What the effect of this sermon was, you have in the 42d verse, namely, that when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath-day.

But here comes a question, which I ought to answer before I go on any further with the story. How comes it to pass that we find here both Jews and Gentiles worshipping God in one synagogue, and that too in an heathen country, as Pisidia was? Nay, it seems by this place, it was their constant practice so to do every sabbath-day.

In answer to this, you must know, that in the time of our Saviour and his apostles, the Jews, tho' they still kept their own land, yet abundance of that nation had transplanted themselves into other countries: Nay, most of the great cities were then full of them; and where-ever they came, they erected synagogues for the worship of God. And then, as for the Gentiles joining with them in that worship, you are not, by these Gentiles, to understand the common sort of heathens, or Gentiles who were idolaters, for with such the Jews would have nothing to do; no more than *they* would have to do with the Jews. But it so happened always, that by conversation with the Jews, where-ever they came, and by the means of those excellent notions about religion, that they could furnish men with out of their law, a great many of the more ingenuous sort of the Gentiles were brought from their idolatry to the owning and worship of the one God, the creator of heaven and earth, and likewise to the belief of a future life. And all such as these the Jews accounted in the number of proselytes, and were glad

to have them come to their ſynagogues. Where, beſides joining in the true worſhip of God, they had the benefit of hearing the law and the prophets read every ſabbath-day; which very thing would ſtrongly diſpoſe them to believe in Chriſt's doctrine, whenever it ſhould be made known to them.

For the fuller underſtanding of this, you are to know that there were two ſorts of proſelytes among the Jews: Some that were ſtrictly ſo called; and ſome that were called ſo in a larger ſenſe. The proſelytes, in the more ſtrict ſenſe, were all thoſe Gentiles that were ſo far perſuaded of the truth of Moſes's law, and the privileges it did intitle them to, that they intirely entred themſelves into that covenant, becoming circumciſed, and obliging themſelves to obſerve all the laws of Moſes. Now theſe proſelytes were, in all reſpects, accounted as natural-born Jews; and theſe were called proſelytes of the covenant. But there were but few of this ſort. The proſelytes in a larger ſenſe, were thoſe that ſo far joined with the Jews, as to worſhip the one ſupream God, and to frame their lives according to the laws of nature, which were delivered by God to the children of Adam and Noah, tho' yet they never circumciſed themſelves, nor entered into the Moſaical covenant. For by the laws of God in the Old-teſtament, all people, that would come thus far, were allowed to live among the Jews, and to worſhip God with them: Nay, and in the very temple they had a place appointed them to worſhip God in, which was called the court of the Gentiles; and theſe are thoſe that are ſo often mentioned in the Old-teſtament by the name of the ſtrangers among them; as particularly in the fourth commandment, where God having ordered that they ſhould do no manner of work

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on the ſabbath-day, he adds, neither thou, nor thy ſon, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-ſervant, nor thy maid-ſervant, nor thy cattle, nor the *ſtranger* that is within thy gate; from which expreſſion the Jews uſed to call this latter ſort of proſelytes by the name of the proſelytes of the gate, as they did the former by the name of the proſelytes of the covenant. Now this latter ſort of proſelytes continued Gentiles ſtill, notwithſtanding their being proſelytes; and of this ſort there was always a great number, both in Judæa, and in all other countries where the Jews came to inhabit. Of this ſort, for inſtance, was the centurion in the goſpel, of whom the Jews ſaid, that he loved their nation, and had built them a ſynagogue. Of this ſort likewiſe was Cornelius, a Roman captain in Cæſarea, who is called a devout man, and one that feared God, with all his houſe. Of this ſort again was Lydia, the ſeller of purple in Thyatira, who is ſaid to be a worſhipper of God. In a word, where-ever in the *Acts of the Apoſtles* you meet with devout perſons, or devout Greeks, or worſhipping Greeks, you are always by thoſe expreſſions to underſtand thoſe Gentile proſelytes we are now ſpeaking of; and that the Gentiles here mentioned in the 42d verſe of this chapter I am now upon, were of this ſort, is abundantly evident from the next (43d) verſe, where thoſe that are called Gentiles in the former verſe, are called religious proſelytes; or rather, it ought to be render'd, worſhipping proſelytes, in this verſe.

Having now thus cleared this difficulty, let us go on with the ſtory. The Gentiles having deſired St. Paul to preach on the ſame argument the next ſabbath-day; when that day came, as appears in the 44th verſe, almoſt the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But then it follows in the 45th verſe, that

when the Jews ſaw the multitude, they were filled with envy, and ſpake againſt thoſe things which were ſpoken by Paul, contradicting and blaſpheming. Upon this, it follows in the next verſe, that then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and ſaid, it was neceſſary, that the word of God ſhould firſt have been ſpoken to you; but ſeeing you put it from you, and judge yourſelves unworthy of eternal life, Lo! we turn to the Gentiles. Exactly did the apoſtles here obey their orders; for by Chriſt's commiſſion they were firſt in every place to preach the goſpel to the Jews, and afterwards to the Gentiles; and for this St. Paul vouches a ſufficient warrant out of the Old-teſtament, as you may ſee in the next (47th) verſe.

But what came of all this? Why that follows in the 48th verſe: *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.* This was the effect of St. Paul's ſecond ſermon.

He preached to the Jews, and endeavoured to convince them, out of Moſes and the prophets, that Jeſus Chriſt was the Saviour of the world. But they made light of this, and judged themſelves unworthy of eternal life. Upon this he turns to the Gentiles, and they were very glad of the good news, and embraced it heartily, and glorified God for it, *And* accordingly *as many* among them *as were ordained to eternal life, believed.*

This is the hiſtory of my text, as it lies in the chapter. Let us now examine what is the true meaning of theſe laſt words of it——*As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.*——The ſenſe that many of us, when we hear theſe words, are apt to pitch upon is this; That all thoſe in that city that were particularly

larly and by name decreed and elected by God from all eternity to everlasting life, all those did, upon St. Paul's preaching, believe the gospel.

I do not here pretend to dispute the doctrine of particular election; I account it an arrogant thing to meddle with those secrets. God may, or may not, have ordained particular persons to eternal life, for any thing that we can say on either side: This therefore I do not meddle with; all that I say, is this; That whatever God hath done in this matter, yet this text doth not speak any thing of it. So far from that, that there are unanswerable proofs to be given, that it relates to a quite different purpose. Two things I will here offer:

First of all, let it be considered that the word that is here used, will not well bear such a signification. The word is τεταγμένοι. We render it *ordained*. But if by *ordaining* we mean predestinating from all eternity, it is certain the word hath no such signification, either in scripture or any other author. The proper English of it, is ordered—commanded—appointed—put in battle array—prepared—disposed—set in readiness. Any of these words doth express its sense: but no where (as the critics do observe) is it used to express any eternal decree of God.

The scripture always makes use of other words for that business. Besides, if we should be willing to take this word in that sense in this text, tho' it be no where else taken so, yet there is a main thing wanting to make it capable of that sense, for God is not here mentioned. It is not said, As many as were ordained *of God* to eternal life, believed; which certainly had been necessary, if St. Luke had meant that this ordination was of God; for otherwise men could not have thought of a

decree of God in this place, conſidering that the word imports no ſuch thing. But it is only ſaid ſimply, As many as were τεταγμένοι; from whence it is plain, that we are left to the common uſual ſenſe of that word.

This is the firſt thing. In the ſecond place, if St. Luke be ſuppoſed in the text to have ſpoken of any particular election of perſons to ſalvation, then his words muſt carry this ſenſe, That of thoſe who heard St. Paul preach at that time, as many of them as were from all eternity decreed to everlaſting ſalvation, all thoſe did, at that time, believe in Jeſus Chriſt. This, I ſay, according to this interpretation, muſt be the ſenſe. But now ſee what abundance of abſurdities will follow upon this interpretation of his words.

In the firſt place, by admitting this ſenſe, you ſuppoſe that all thoſe that heard St. Paul's ſermon, and did not at that time become converts to chriſtianity, were reprobates; for if all thoſe that were predeſtinated to eternal life did then believe, all thoſe that did not then believe were reprobates. But now this doctrine ſeems quite different from the doctrine of the goſpel, for that tells us, that all men are not called at once, but ſome at one time, and ſome at another. And I do not doubt but that ſeveral of thoſe that then heard St. Paul, and were not convinced by his ſermon, might afterwards, upon further conſideration, and further inſtruction, and hearing St. Paul preach again upon the ſame argument, at laſt become chriſtians, tho' they did not believe at the firſt.

In the ſecond place, there is this abſurdity follows likewiſe upon this interpretation, that it ſuppoſeth all thoſe that then believed, upon St. Paul's preaching, were eternally ſaved; for certainly if they were particularly

culariy elected to eternal life, they could not miſcarry. But now this ſeems likewiſe very different from the ſenſe of the goſpel; for Chriſt hath told us, that *many are called, but few are choſen*: that is, a great many may give in their names to Chriſt, and take upon them the profeſſion of his religion; but few are thoſe that do approve themſelves true, ſincere, choice chriſtians, ſuch as ſhall be thought worthy of eternal life. It is too much to ſay (I am ſure it is more than we can prove) that all thoſe that believed the goſpel upon St. Paul's preaching, did infallibly go to heaven. It is probable there might be ſeveral among them, that tho' they then believed, yet either did not perſevere, or did not bring forth the fruits of the goſpel in an holy and pure life. Now if there was but one man in all the company, that fell under this cenſure, it quite deſtroys that interpretation of the text we are now ſpeaking of.

But in the third place, I urge this: St. Luke, that wrote this hiſtory of the acts of the apoſtles, tells us here, that upon ſuch a ſermon that St. Paul made, all that were ordained to eternal life, believed. We now would expound his words, that all that were predeſtinated to eternal life, believed. The thing I aſk now is, whether, according to this expoſition, we do not make St. Luke to ſay a great deal more than he knew? For how could he pronounce (tho' we ſuppoſe him preſent at the making of the converts) that all thoſe particular perſons, that were then convinced by St. Paul's doctrine, ſhould infallibly be ſaved; and all the reſt of the hearers, that were not then converted, ſhould be infallibly damned? Sure he could not pretend to know any thing of this; for we have reaſon to believe that he knew no more about the final condition of particular men, than the apoſtles of our Lord did. And yet none

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of them pretended to make any such judgment concerning the particular converts that came in to them. For the election of God concerning particular persons (if there be any such) is only known to God. The conclusion therefore is, that it is extremely improbable, if not impossible, that St. Luke should mean any such thing as we would fasten upon his words.

But what then is the meaning of his words? *As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.* Why, to that, I say, the whole thing depends upon the translation of one word, and that, as I told you, is τεταγμένοι. We render it *ordained.* But our translators, if they had pleased, might have pitched upon three or four other words, that would better have expressed the signification of it, and have cleared the sense beyond all exception. This word, if you will consult the usage of it in authors, cannot be more naturally rendered than *fitted*, or *prepared*, or *set in order*, or *disposed for.* Take now any one of these rendrings, and it will fully hit the sense of my text, and avoid all those absurdities that I have been speaking of. The case before us is this; The Jews put away the gospel from them, and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. The Gentiles, on the contrary, glorified God for the good news that eternal life shall be offered to them; and accordingly, as St. Luke here tells you, as many of those Gentiles as had fitted and prepared themselves, or were set in order, or disposed for eternal life, all these did, upon St. Paul's preaching, believe the gospel, and became christians. If you remember, in the 9th of St. Luke, our Saviour speaks of some persons that were not fit for the kingdom of God; and such would not believe in him. But now these people were fit for the kingdom

kingdom of God, and therefore they did embrace the gospel as soon as ever they heard of it.

This now, I dare venture to say, is a natural, easy exposition of this difficult text; and that which, if you will stand to the judgment of the most learned expositors, is the only true meaning of it. But here is nothing in all this, of any eternal decree of God concerning any particular man's salvation, (nor indeed was there any reason to expect it) which was the thing to be proved.

Having thus given you a full account of this text, I now come to draw some inferences from it by way of application. And the first thing you may take notice of from hence is this, That all men are not equally prepared and disposed for eternal life; for you see plainly by this text, that some were unworthy of eternal life, and others were fitted and disposed for it. If you ask a reason of this difference in men, the text will thus far give you it, that this difference in men, as to their fitness and unfitness for eternal life, doth not proceed from any decree of God concerning them, but purely from their own voluntary management of themselves. Those that are here pronounced unworthy of eternal life, it is not said of them, that God had made them so, or that he had decreed them to be so, but that they made themselves unworthy; and by parity of reason, we may say the same thing of those that were prepared for eternal life: they, by well improving that grace which God had already given them, had made themselves fit and qualified for the receiving any further discoveries of God to them, that should direct them to eternal life. All our fitness or unfitness for the kingdom of heaven, as far as we can learn from the scriptures, depends wholly upon this single point, of our using,

uſing, or not uſing, our natural powers, and that further grace and opportunities he beſtows upon us, to the right purpoſes, that we are in our own conſciences convinced we ought to uſe them to. Whoſoever doth heartily endeavour with an honeſt mind to approve himſelf to God, by obſerving all thoſe things which, by the preſent light he hath, he judges to be his duty, every ſuch man is fitted and prepared for the kingdom of God. But whoſoever eſpouſeth any intereſt contrary to his conſcience, or engages himſelf in any courſe of vice or wickedneſs, contrary to his known duty, every ſuch man doth put away the grace of God from him, and renders himſelf unworthy of the kingdom of God.

In the ſecond place, another thing I obſerve from theſe words, is this: That all thoſe that are fitted and prepared for eternal life, will certainly embrace the goſpel, and become chriſtians, whenever that goſpel is fairly propoſed to them; *As many*, ſaith the text, *as were* ſet in order *for eternal life*, *believed*. God Almighty never meant to deliver ſuch a goſpel to mankind, as that all indiſcriminately, both good and bad, ſhould be equally capable of perceiving the evidence of it, and being perſuaded by the motives that it offered. This would have been to over-rule mens wills, and to have made faith not to be a virtue, but a mathematical ſcience. But God ſo ordered things, that there ſhould be ſufficient evidence for the truth of his goſpel to all good men: But yet, not ſuch evidence as would convince thoſe that were obſtinately bad. And this is that which our Saviour hath often occaſion to mention in his diſcourſes. He tells us of ſome that could not believe; and he gives us the reaſon why they could not, becauſe they were ſlaves to luſt, and paſſion, and intereſt. But he delivers it as a general

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propoſition (John vii. 17.) that whoſoever will ſincerely apply himſelf to do God's will, as far as he knows it, every ſuch man ſhall certainly be convinced of the truth of his doctrine, that it is from God. And to this purpoſe is that famous parable of his, which is recorded by no leſs than three of the evangeliſts, concerning the ſower that went out to ſow good ſeed in his ground. The ſum of that parable is this: That though the good ſeed of the goſpel was ſown upon all ſorts of ground, yet it took root in none but in the good ground; that That was prepared before-hand for the receiving of it: But where ever the ſeed was ſown in that ſort of ground, there it brought forth in ſome twenty, in ſome thirty, in others an hundred-fold.

And therefore, in the third place, to obſerve this further, we may be fairly enabled from hence to give a reaſon, why there are ſo many unbelievers and infidels among us at this day. If we find ſeveral among us that make light of the chriſtian religion, and talk contemptibly of our Saviour and his doctrines, as, God knows, there are ſuch as theſe to be met with, what are you to conclude from hence? that there is no reaſon, no argument, no evidence to be offered for chriſtianity, becauſe theſe men, who are acknowledged to be men of wit and parts, make it their buſineſs to run it down? This is that indeed they bear you in hand with: But it is the falſeſt concluſion in the world. Alas! you are much miſtaken in your men; they never much applied their heads to examine theſe things. They have, perhaps, got out of ſome lewd books, and from their lewder company, ſome common-place heads, with which they think they can diſparage chriſtianity; and it is likely they have wit enough to ſet off thoſe things to advantage; But as for ſerious thinking

ing and putting things together, and making a ſolemn judgment of what is true or falſe in thoſe matters, as in the preſence of God, and as in a buſineſs wherein their everlaſting ſalvation or damnation doth depend; I ſay, as for this, you may aſſure yourſelves, theſe men never did it, nor are capable of doing it: It is not in their natures to give themſelves ſo much trouble (ſuch a fatigue, as they will call it) as ſuch a work will require; and therefore you may be ſure that their infidelity doth not proceed from any real want of evidence, or arguments, for the truth of the chriſtian religion, but from this, that theſe men have ſo wretchedly abuſed their faculties, by debauchery and ill practices, that they have made themſelves unworthy of eternal life, as St. Luke here expreſſeth it.

And the truth of this I am ſo confident of, that I dare appeal to you all about it. Did any of you ever in your lives know a man amongſt us that had the confidence to aſſert, that he believed nothing of Chriſt's religion, that you did in your conſciences believe to be a ſerious and virtuous man? Have you ever known any man that made it his buſineſs to live virtuouſly, and ſoberly, and godly in all his converſation, according to the methods that the light of nature would teach him? I ſay, can you name that man in all this nation, that thus feared God, and made a conſcience of all his actions, that was not a ſincere believer in Jeſus Chriſt? I dare ſay, ſuch a man is not within the compaſs of your knowledge. And if it be ſo (as I am confident it is) that unbelief that is found among us, is not to be imputed either to the want of proof of the chriſtian religion among us, or to any decree of God that hath paſſed upon thoſe unbelievers, but merely to their ill-managing themſelves, and their being pre-

pre-engaged in obſtinate habits of vice and wickedneſs.

In the fourth place, from what I have delivered about this text, we may be able to give a fair and rational account of the quick ſpreading of the goſpel throughout the world upon the apoſtles preaching of it. It may appear a wonder, that the pagan nations ſhould ſo readily embrace the goſpel, when it was firſt preached to them, as we find it did, when yet they had been bred up in a way ſo directly contrary to it. Undoubtedly there was the hand of God in this. But God uſually brings his own great works to paſs in the ordinary methods of nature; and there was ſomething of that here. For ſo had the divine providence ordered the matter, that the minds of the Gentiles had by degrees been prepared for the reception of the goſpel at the time when the apoſtles were ſent to preach it. So that there was not ſuch a leap from their paganiſm to chriſtianity, as one would at firſt imagine. For thus ſtood the caſe; It pleaſed God, in the latter end of the Jewiſh commonwealth, to ſuffer the Gentiles to break in upon them. They firſt became a prey to the Babylonians; afterwards to the Greeks. While they were under the Greeks, their ſcriptures, which had been before locked up in the Hebrew tongue, were tranſlated into Greek, which was then the univerſal language. After this, about forty years before our Saviour, they were conquered by the Romans, and then they became a Roman province. Now theſe ſeveral conqueſts were the occaſion that the Jews became more mingled with other nations, than ever they were before. So that, as I told you, in our Saviour's time all the great cities in the world were full of them; and in every city, by the indulgence of the government,

ment, they had their ſynagogues. Now by this means the Gentiles, having every where opportunity of converſing with the Jews, and having likewiſe their ſcriptures in the common language, many of them were, in all places, by the bleſſing of God, converted from their pagan idolatry; and not only ſo, but, by reading the ſcriptures, and hearing them read in the Jewiſh ſynagogues, were likewiſe brought to ſome expectation of the Meſſias, which was there promiſed. So that abundance of them were prepared, and were in readineſs for the belief of the goſpel, whenever it ſhould be preached to them; and of ſuch as theſe it is that my text ſpeaks.

That I have not given you any wrong account of this matter, appears plainly by this, that all along in the *Acts of the Apoſtles*, you will find, that that great harveſt of the Gentiles, which the apoſtles reaped in every place, was chiefly made up of theſe worſhipping Gentiles that I am now ſpeaking of. Theſe were the men, that in every city were ſo forward to give up their names to Chriſt's religion. And the apoſtles were aware of this, and accordingly you find they always choſe thoſe places to preach the goſpel in, where there were Jewiſh ſynagogues, and ſo not improbably a great number of theſe Gentile proſelytes: Such was Babylon, and Rome, and Corinth, and Antioch, and Epheſus, and Philippi, and Theſſalonica, and a great many others. And that is the reaſon likewiſe, that in St. Paul's Epiſtles to all theſe Gentile churches, which were of his planting, there is ſo much ſaid concerning the Jews and the law of Moſes, and the non-obligation of it, and ſuch other things. All this had been impertinent to the Gentile chriſtians, had they not

not been tinctur'd with the Jewish notions about these matters.

In the fifth place, to draw this matter nearer to ourselves, you see, by what I have said, how much all this affair of being a christian, or not being a christian, depends upon the principles and dispositions that a man's mind is possessed with at that time, when he comes to consider about the choice of his religion.

The inference that I draw from hence, is this; Of what infinite concernment it is to all those that have children or young persons about them, whose education they are to look after, to take care that their minds be seasoned betimes with good principles, and that there be put in them some sense of God and religion, and another life, in their tender years. If this care be taken, they will, in all probability, prove the good ground that is spoken of by our Saviour; and when they come to years to chuse for themselves, there is little doubt to be made, but that they will voluntarily and heartily espouse the religion of Jesus Christ, and will find all the reason in the world to do so. But if no care be taken of them, but the weeds of vice (which are natural enough) be suffered first to possess the soil, that is, their passions, and lust, and pride, and sensuality, and love of the world, have once taken up their hearts, it is very doubtful whether ever they will afterwards be fit for the kingdom of God; whether ever they will be prepared and disposed for eternal life (as our text expresseth it.) It must be an extraordinary providence of God that must make them so.

In the sixth and last place, to conclude all. Our text tells us, that all that were disposed and prepared for

for eternal life, believed. Here now is great comfort to be drawn from hence to all ſincere honeſt-minded men. What though there be great differences of religion at this time even among chriſtians, ſome being for one way, and ſome for another, and every one telling you, that it is at the peril of your ſalvation, if you do not join with them, (though, to ſpeak truth, I know of no ſect in the whole world, neither Jews, nor Pagans, nor Mahometans, much leſs chriſtians, that do ſo peremptorily pronounce damnation to all thoſe that are not of their way, as the Papiſts do; unleſs perhaps you will join with them a late ſect among us, called the Muggletonians) Why, I ſay, let theſe differences be carried never ſo high, yet every ſincere honeſt man is ſafe all the while. Every man that truly fears God, and endeavours heartily to approve himſelf to him by the practice of all thoſe things that he is convinced to be God's will, I ſay, every ſuch man may firmly depend upon the mercies of God for his ſalvation, for he is fitted and diſpoſed for eternal life. And God will certainly, either by his providence, take care that means ſhall be afforded him for the coming to the right way, if he be not already in it; or if he do not afford him thoſe means, he will pardon his ignorance and miſtakes, which he could not help, and accept of his honeſty and ſincerity in doing the beſt he could. For I account it an eternal truth, which St. Peter hath told us in the 10th of the Acts, in his ſermon to Cornelius, *God is no reſpecter of perſons: But in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted of him.*

I pray God incline all our hearts thus to fear God, and work righteouſneſs, that ſo we may find his favour in the great day of the Lord Jeſus. This, God of his mercy grant, for the ſake of the ſame his dear Son, our Lord:

To whom, &c.

SRE-

SERMON XIX.

The ſenſe of the following Text cleared.

St. MATT. xx. 16.

So the laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt; for many be called, but few choſen.

THIS Text ſeems to be made up of two ſhort ſentences; and I look upon them as proverbial expreſſions, becauſe we find our Saviour doth more than once make uſe of them, tho' indeed always to the ſame purpoſe that he uſeth them here. As he applies them, they have a very eaſy and natural ſenſe: but as we oftentimes make uſe of them, the meaning is very hard; at leaſt abundance of people put ſuch a meaning upon them as is uncomfortable enough, not to ſay worſe.

It is my deſign at this time to clear the ſenſe of this text, that no body hereafter may be frighted with it; and the beſt key we can have to let us into the meaning of it, is that parable which our Saviour juſt before had

had been delivering, upon occaſion of which theſe words come in. Here are, as I ſaid, two diſtinct ſentences; the firſt of which ſeems to be a kind of inference from the parable, which our Saviour had been delivering, *So the laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt.* The other ſeems to be added as a reaſon for the truth of that, *For many be called, and few choſen.*

The parable, upon occaſion of which theſe words were ſpoken, and which is to guide to the meaning of them, is that famous one of the houſholder, that went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard; and ſome he hired in the beginning of the day, others three hours after, others at noon, others but juſt an hour before night. And in the evening, when they came to receive their wages, he ordered that that hire (which was a penny) which he had agreed with the labourers for that came the earlieſt, the ſame hire ſhould be given to thoſe that came in the lateſt, even thoſe that had but wrought one hour. At which ſome of them murmured: but the houſholder's anſwer was, that he might diſpoſe of his own as he pleaſed; and ſo long as he performed his contract with them, they had no reaſon to repine at his bounty to others.

This is the ſum of the parable, and then come in the words of my text, by way of inference from the whole parable, *So the laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt; for many are called, and few choſen.*

The buſineſs now that is here to be done, is to give ſuch an account of this parable, that there may appear a ſufficient ground for this inference; that is to ſay, we are to connect, if we can, the premiſes with the concluſion; and if that be done, the ſenſe of the text will be eaſy.

Now

Now certainly, by the houſholder in the parable, is meant God Almighty; by the vineyard that he had, is meant the church in all ages; by the labourers that he called to work in this vineyard, are meant all thoſe people to whom at any time he afforded the knowledge of his will, and the means of approving themſelves to him. By the penny which theſe labourers were to have for their work, is meant the reward that he made over to all thoſe that obeyed his call: and whereas all theſe labourers were hired but to work one day in the vineyard, that day, according to what I have now ſaid, muſt be a very long day, as long as from the beginning of the world to the end thereof; for all that time God was to have a vineyard, and all that time men were to be called to work in it; and therefore by thoſe labourers that were hired more early, muſt be meant thoſe that were called to be of God's church in the earlier times of the world; and by thoſe labourers that were hired more late, muſt be intended thoſe that were called in the latter times of the world. And both theſe ſorts of men were to receive their wages at the evening of the day, that is to ſay, at the end of the world. And when that time came, God would make no diſtinction between thoſe that were called more early, and thoſe that were called more late, but would beſtow as bountiful a reward upon thoſe that came to work in the vineyard at the eleventh hour, as upon thoſe that bore the burden and heat of the day.

This is the general interpretation of the parable; and for the truth of it we may appeal both to the parable itſelf, (which cannot, without violence, be made to ſpeak any otherwiſe) and likewiſe to the judgment of the beſt expoſitors of holy ſcripture, both antient and modern.

But now, leſt any one ſhould ſay that this is not explicit enough, I will endeavour to give you a more particular account of this parable.

I do ſuppoſe, that the great thing which our Saviour here deſign'd to declare in this parable was this, That tho' the Jews were far ſooner called to work in God's vineyard (that is, to be God's own ſervants) than the Gentiles were, yet the Gentiles from henceforward ſhould have the ſame privileges that they had ever had. The Gentiles from henceforward, tho' they were not called till the laſt ages of the world, ſhould, upon their belief in Jeſus Chriſt, be as much God's peculiar people, as the Jews ever had been, and ſhould have the ſame reward at the day of judgment, as if they had been God's people from the beginning: nay, not only ſo, but the Jews, for their unbelief, their not embracing the goſpel that Chriſt preached to them, ſhould be caſt off from being God's peculiar people any longer: and the Gentiles, that were called at the eleventh hour, the laſt times of the world, ſhould be put into their place, becauſe they did believe in Chriſt Jeſus, when the others did not. So that the proverbial ſaying ſhould here be true, *The laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt*; that is to ſay, the Gentiles that were laſt called in point of time, ſhould be firſt in the favour of God; and the Jews that were firſt called, ſhould be rejected by God for a ſeaſon; not for ever rejected, but the Gentiles were to be preferred before them, and have their turn firſt; and afterwards, when the fulneſs of the Gentiles was come in, then ſhould the Jews be again hired into the vineyard (as both our Saviour intimates, and St. Paul expreſly declares in the 11th chapter of the epiſtle to the Romans.) So that really in this caſe, as God ordered the matter, the laſt was firſt, and the firſt is

laſt; and thus we ſee it verified to this very day. And this, I think, is a very clear account of the firſt ſentence in my text. If any one now ſhould aſk a reaſon of this proceeding of God's, in caſting off the body of the Jewiſh nation from being his people, and taking in the Gentiles for his church, our Saviour, in this place, takes care likewiſe to give an account of that; and he doth it in theſe words, *For many be called, and few choſen.* The ſenſe of which is plainly this, Chriſt came to preach his goſpel to the Jews in the firſt place, and to them it was ſufficiently preached, and the whole nation was called and invited to come into it. But tho' they were all thus called, yet few of them did accept of this call, few of them did embrace the goſpel when it was thus preached. Few of them approved themſelves the choice, elect, honeſt, ſincere people of God, which they pretended to be; and therefore with great reaſon was the body of that nation to be abandoned, and the church of God to be gathered from among the Gentiles, who did more readily embrace the call of Chriſt Jeſus. This, according to the beſt judgment I can make, is the true and the full ſenſe of this text, and I am ſure I have good authors to vouch for it.

If you require a ſcripture proof of this, I can give you that too. I have interpreted our Saviour's words here, *The laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt*, of the rejection of the Jewiſh nation from being the church of God, and the taking in the Gentiles into their place: now, for the truth of this, I offer another text of our Saviour's, where he uſeth the very ſame expreſſion; it is in Luke, chap. xiii. ver. 30. There our Saviour is ſpeaking to the Jews; and he tells them how diſmal a ſpectacle it would be to them, to ſee Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom

of God, and they themselves cast out; and men should come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and should sit down in the kingdom of God; and then he adds, *Behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.* This, I think, is pretty fair to our purpose: but if it be not plain enough, mind how our Saviour himself explains it in another text, I mean Matt. viii. ver. 11, 12. *Many*, saith he, *shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom* (that is, the whole generation of Israel, who received not the gospel at the preaching of Christ and his apostles) *shall be cast out into outer darkness.* Sure here is a sufficient explanation of his *last being first, and the first last.*

Again, I have interpreted the other sentence of our Saviour, of the *many being called, and few being chosen*, to signify the general invitation which Christ first made to the Jewish nation to believe in him, and the fewness of those that came in upon this invitation. Now, for the truth of this likewise, I have a text of the gospel to refer you to; there is but one other text where our Saviour useth these words, *Many are called, but few chosen.* And it is likewise at the foot of a parable as he useth them here; the place is Matt. xxii. 14. Now I appeal to all men, that will consider that parable, whether this sentence must not necessarily have the same sense there, which we do put upon it here? Our Saviour in that place describes the kingdom of heaven, or the state of the gospel in the world, by the similitude of a king, that sent forth his servants to invite all those of his royal city to the marriage-feast of his son: but these citizens, when they were invited, refused to come;

made light of the invitation, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize; nay, and the reſt took the king's ſervants and treated them ſpitefully, and ſlew them. Here is a true deſcription of the uſage that our Lord Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles met with from the Jews, whom he invited to partake of his ſupper. Upon this the king ſaith to his ſervants, *The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. Go therefore into the high-way, and as many as ye ſhall find, invite them to the marriage*; and the event was, that by this means *the wedding was furniſhed with gueſts*. Here now is a plain account of Chriſt's taking in the Gentiles to be the citizens of his kingdom, inſtead of the Jews. Well, after this, follows the aphoriſm that we are now upon, *For many are called, but few are choſen*. What can this refer to, but to the multitude of the Jews that were invited to Chriſt's religion, and the fewneſs of them that embraced it? This was the deſign of the parable; and, I dare ſay, this was the meaning of that ſentence which concluded it.

But I will offer no more proof for the truth of this account which I have given of my text, becauſe I would no longer ſpend my time in a thing that looks like a controverſy. I think I have ſaid enough to convince any unbiaſs'd man, that this is the true ſenſe of our Saviour's words; and therefore I will now build upon it.

And ſeveral inferences I have to draw from it.

Firſt of all, from hence we ſee how impertinently this parable of the labourers that were hired into the vineyard is made uſe of to the purpoſe of a death-bed repentance. The common application of it is this; That ſome men are called earlier, and ſome men later.

But

But if a man be but called at any time, tho' it be in the last moments of his life; if even at that time he do but give any marks that God hath touched his heart, tho' he hath been otherwise never so lewd, so profligate a sinner all his life long, why here is ground enough for comfort; for certainly this man is one of those that was called at the eleventh hour, the last time of his life; and he hath as much a title to the promises of God, as if he had begun never so early.

I do not mean here to say any thing about this doctrine, either as to the truth or falseness of it; but this I say, if it have no other ground to support it but this parable, it is built upon a very weak foundation; for there is not one word of this parable that concerns particular persons, but only peoples and nations. The day that is here spoken of, in which men were called to do their work, is not meant of the term of a man's life, as if those that were called early, were those that begun to be religious betimes; those that were called at noon, were those that were converted at the middle part of their lives; and those that were called at the eleventh hour, were those that never begun to consider of their ways till near the end of their days: This is, indeed, the common way of interpreting the parable, but it is quite at random from the scope of it; for the day, as I told you, here spoken of, bears the same date with the world; it begun with it, and is to end with it; and according to this notion of the day, it is impossible that all nations and generations should be called at one time, because they were not all at once in being, and therefore some must be called sooner, and some later. The first that were called, were the patriarchs. These were they that were sent to work in the vineyard early in the morning. Afterwards, in Abraham's time, God called

others, by a new covenant made with him and his ſeed; and theſe were thoſe (we may ſuppoſe) that were called at the third hour of the day. Afterwards God makes a new call by Moſes: And here he ſets a hedge and a mound about his vineyard, diſtinguiſhing the Jews for his own people from all the reſt of the world, and that by obliging them to a world of rites and ceremonies that were never practiſed before: And theſe I take to be thoſe that were called at the ſixth hour, and of whom it was afterwards ſaid in the parable, that *they had borne the burden in the heat of the day:* For truly, if God's people can bear a burden, the Jews did bear a great one in the very nature of their religion. But all this, as St. Paul tells us, was to *lead them to Chriſt*. And accordingly, at laſt, God Almighty did ſend Chriſt Jeſus, and by him he broke down the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles, and made an univerſal call of all nations. But this was not till the laſt days, the laſt times, as the prophets expreſly ſtile them, that is, the eleventh hour of the day, as it is in the parable. Not that it is hereby meant that the world ſhould end preciſely within one twelfth part of that compaſs of time after which Chriſt came, that it had continued from the beginning of it: But this is all that is meant, that the laſt diſpenſation that God would ſet on foot in the world for the happineſs of man, ſhould be the ſending of our Lord Jeſus and his apoſtles. This ſhould be his laſt call; and after this, there ſhould be no more hiring of mankind (except in the ordinary way) to work in God's vineyard. This, as I told you before in general (but have now explained it more particularly) is the only true and natural ſenſe of this parable. And if it be ſo, I appeal to all mankind, whether

whether it hath any thing at all to do with any particular man's repenting either sooner or later; or whether any comfort can be drawn from hence to such men as have lived wickedly all their lives long, and never think of reforming till they come to die.

In the second place, another thing I observe from hence, is this, That it is as impertinent to conclude from this parable, that all men that die in a good condition, shall have equal rewards in the other world, because in the parable it is said, that those that wrought but one hour had the same wages adjudged to them with those that had wrought all the day: I say, this conclusion hath as little foundation from this parable, as the other opinion I now mentioned, about a death-bed repentance. For, as you see, Christ doth not here speak of particular persons that were contemporaries, some of which might begin more early in their lives to serve God, and others begin later. If this had been the case of the parable, I should have owned it would have made no great difference in a man's future state, whether he lived well or ill the greatest part of his life, provided he became a good man, and a sincere christian, at the last; for his rewards in the next world, according to this parable, would be much the same in both these cases: But, as I have over and over again said, the parable relates to a quite different matter, and speaks not of those that came into the vineyard together, but of those that came in successively, perhaps many generations one after another. And of all these our Saviour pronounceth, that it shall be no lessening of their rewards, that some nations were not called to be God's people as early as some others; for even those that were last called, shall as abundantly partake of God Almigh-

ty's bounty in the other world, as if they had been his peculiar people from the beginning.

But now, I pray, what is all this to the greater or leſs degree of glory, or the greater or leſs degree of puniſhment, that particular men ſhall meet with in the future ſtate, according to the different degrees of goodneſs or badneſs, virtue or vice, that they are found in when God calls them out of the world?

In the third place, another reflection, which I think I ought not to paſs over without mentioning upon this occaſion, is this, That, by what has been now ſaid, you may ſee how very much people are out in their application of another parable, that I had occaſion to quote ſince I begun this diſcourſe; I mean, the parable wherein the king made a marriage for his ſon, and invited firſt his citizens, and afterwards all ſorts of chance cuſtomers, that were found ſtraggling in the high-ways and lanes, to come and partake of the wedding-ſupper.

This now, among us, is commonly expounded of the ſacrament of the communion, which we call the Lord's ſupper. And, to be ſure, if any man comes to partake of this ſacrament, that is not ſatisfied in his own mind that he is fitly prepared and qualified to take it, he preſently looks upon himſelf to be that gueſt which the parable mentions, which came to the marriage ſupper without having on a wedding garment: And who, being diſcovered by the king to be in this unſeemly habit, is ordered to be bound hand and foot, and caſt into outer darkneſs.

But now all this is a great miſtake; the parable ſaith not one word concerning the ſacrament, but is quite about another buſineſs, as I have told you before:

The

The marriage that is here made for the king's son, is certainly Christ Jesus his coming down into the world in our nature to espouse a church made up of all mankind. And accordingly all mankind are invited to come and partake of his mercies. The Jews were the first that were solemnly bidden, as there was reason for it, they having been a long time God's own citizens. But they rejected the invitation. Upon this the Gentiles were called in; and they do embrace the call. But it happened then, as it happens now, and will happen to the end of the world, that among those that, upon the invitation of Christ and his apostles, came in to christianity, and entered themselves into the new covenant, some were not sincere, but proved hypocrites; they professed Christ's religion, but yet, for all that, their natures were not changed, they still stuck to their old Gentile customs, which corrupt nature had taught them; though they called themselves the children of the light, yet they lived no better than if they had still remained in the darkness of heathenism. Thus I say, it was then; and thus it is now, and will always be so. But now all these hypocritical professors shall, at the last day, be detected and openly punished. When God, at the end of the world, comes to take a view of his guests, he will make a difference with a witness between all real and all pretended christians. Those that have nothing but the name and the profession, all those shall be looked upon as not having on a wedding-garment, but to be in the state of heathenism. But all those that, together with their baptism and profession of Christ's religion, do bring forth fruit suitable to it; all these, I say, shall enter with the bridegroom into his everlasting mansions of glory, when the others shall be shut out. This, I dare confidently say, is the

true

true account of that parable; and now judge ye, whether there be any thing in it that hath to do with the ſacrament?

But fourthly, from this account that I have given of my text, you may ſee what little reaſon any one hath from this text to put the iſſue of his future hopes upon any decrees of God concerning his particular election; or what little reaſon any one hath to be diſturbed or diſquieted from this text, upon account that he doth not know, whether he be particularly elected to ſalvation, or no. And yet this is the common uſe that this text is put to. There is a ſort of divinity in the world, that ſtands ſo much upon a particular election, that, if you cannot aſſure yourſelves that you are in the number of thoſe that are by name written in the book of life, will hardly allow you to be true children of God, whatever other evidence you may produce for it. And this text I am now upon, is one of the great pillars of this ſort of divinity, *Many are called, but few are choſen*; that is to ſay, many are called to be chriſtians, but yet none ſhall be effectually ſaved, but thoſe that are from all eternity choſen and elected of God to ſalvation. And therefore, above all things, ſtudy to make that out to yourſelves.

I will not now diſpute the truth of this doctrine. It is all one to me, whether God from all eternity did predeſtinate all particular perſons, that ſhall be ſaved, to ſalvation; or whether he only made a general decree, that whoſoever did embrace the goſpel, and live according to it, ſhould be ſaved, knowing in the mean time who would embrace the goſpel, and who would not: I ſay, this is not a matter that, I think, ought to be

be controverted; and if we be so foolish as to dispute about it, I do not see that we are the wiser by it, but are as much at a loss when we have done, as we were at the beginning. But this I dare confidently say, that God Almighty never meant, that we should put the evidence of our salvation, or our hopes of being happy hereafter, upon such a point as this; but hath all along taught us other methods for the trying whether we belong to God, or no, quite different from this of our particular election. And as for this text, that is so much urged for the necessity of a particular election, I think I have already made it plain to you, that it refers quite to another business. For all the meaning of these words, as I have shewed, is no more than this, That many in those times were called and invited of Christ to believe in him, but few did answer the call, or accept of the invitation. But what is this to any eternal decree that God has passed concerning the salvation or damnation of particular men?

Well; but it will be said, that the words, if they be strictly rendered from the original, will import more; for thus they run, if you translate them literally, *Many are the called, but few are the elect.* Now what can you understand by the elect, but those that are from all eternity particularly decreed by God to everlasting salvation? I answer, I readily own, that this is a good translation of the passage; but I utterly deny that this is the notion of the elect in this place: Nay, I think I may say in any other place, either in the Old or New-testament. Two notions I know of the elect in scripture: But I know of no more. Sometimes by the elect are meant all those persons in a nation which are in covenant with God, and do own his religion; and in this sense the whole people of the Jews

are,

are, ſeveral times in the Old-teſtament, called God's elect; and in the New-teſtament, all that embraced Chriſt's religion are likewiſe called by the ſame name. Both all the Jews and all the Chriſtians are in ſcripture ſtiled God's elect, that is, in their ſeveral turns they were choſen by God for his peculiar people, tho' yet among thoſe, there were abundance of wicked men and reprobates. Now it is this notion of election that we believe our Saviour meant, when he ſaid, *Many are the called, but few are the elect.* I think he deſigneth no more by thoſe words than this, that few of thoſe that had the goſpel preached to them, did really believe in him, and enter themſelves into covenant with him.

And that this is a true notion of election, ſuch as the ſcripture gives of it, to omit abundance of other plain proofs, doth ſufficiently appear by that remarkable paſſage of St. Peter, 2d Epiſtle, ch. i. ver. 3. where he begs of all chriſtians to give all diligence not only to make their calling, but their election ſure. Why, if the apoſtle had had any notion of an election of particular perſons from all eternity to ſalvation, it is impoſſible he ſhould ever have ſpoke theſe words; for he knew, as well as we, that an eternal decree of God concerning a particular man's ſalvation, would certainly have its effect. And it had been nonſenſe to bid us apply all our diligence in the making of that ſure and certain, which was already ſure and certain in itſelf. It is plain, therefore, that he ſpeaks of the election of chriſtians as a thing that might fail them, if they did not give all diligence to make it effectual; and therefore undoubtedly he meant no more by their election, than the privileges they were called to of profeſſing chri-

christianity, or their being chosen into the number of God's people. This, I say, is one of the notions of election that we frequently meet with in holy scripture; and I do verily believe, that in this notion the chosen, or the elect in my text, are to be understood.

And thus much of my fourth inference. I now proceed to a fifth. Tho' I contend that this sense of my text I have given, is the true literal account of it, and that which was principally designed when the words were spoken, yet I do not deny but that there is another very good sense to be given of it, and such as both the words will bear, and is likewise more accommodable to us at this day, than the other sense is: but then it hath nothing to do with that notion of particular election, that we are now speaking of. I have told you, that I knew but two notions of election in the holy scriptures. One of them I have already given you. The other I am now to speak of. When the elect are spoken of in scripture, there is sometimes more included in that word, than a bare profession of God's religion, whether under the law or under the gospel; it imports, that a man, together with his right belief, doth frame his life according to it. In several passages of scripture those are called God's elect that do really approve themselves to him, by framing their lives suitably to those heavenly doctrines they have received from him; and therefore we find, that the elect of God are frequently join'd with the holy, with the pure, with the beloved of God, as all signifying the same thing. Now in this sense of the word, to be in the number of the elect, it is not enough to be a christian in profession, but to live as a christian ought to live. Taking now the elect in my

text in this ſenſe, this is the meaning of the words, *Many*, ſaith our Saviour, *are the called, but few are the elect*; that is to ſay, Many are thoſe that will, in all the ages of the world, profeſs the chriſtian religion; but yet few are thoſe that are choice ſincere diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt. Few are thoſe that will live up to their chriſtian profeſſion. Few are thoſe that are *elect and precious*, as St. Peter joins both thoſe words together. In a word, Few are thoſe, whoſe converſation is ſuitable to their calling. This now, I ſay, is an honeſt and ſafe interpretation of my text, and ſuch a one as better fits our preſent times, than that other, which I told you was that which was principally intended. But there is nothing in it that looks towards a particular election, nor indeed do we know any thing of that matter.

But ſixthly and laſtly, to conclude all;

The laſt thing I take notice of in this text, is the wonderful counſel of God, in rejecting the Jews, when the goſpel was firſt preached, and taking in the Gentiles to be in their place; and then again, after many ages, deſigning to receive the Jews again for his people. This I judge to be plainly ſaid in the words of my text, *The laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt*; that is, as I have told you, The Gentiles, who were laſt called, ſhall at this time have the precedence of the Jews, who were firſt called: but then they themſelves ſhould be called, effectually called, to the belief of chriſtianity after the fulneſs of the Gentiles was come in. For tho' the firſt are to be laſt, yet called they muſt be, tho' they be laſt called, if our account of the words be true. It is true, this is not yet come to paſs in the world, for the Jews are all yet obſtinate unbelievers, tho' yet they are a vaſt

body

body of men spread over all the world. But I do verily believe, God Almighty would never have kept a people so long from mixing with the nations, tho' they are dispersed into all the parts of the earth, had he not designed to rally them all one day, and to reunite them with the body of the church. And I do not speak this without grounds; for, to omit other texts of scripture, I cannot imagine what sense can be given to those words of St. Paul, in the 11th of the epistle to the Romans, ver. 25. if what I have said be not the sense of it, *I would not*, saith he, *Brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, that blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in: and so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall cōme out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.* St. Paul prosecutes this argument with a great many other words. I grant his whole discourse is obscure, as all prophecies must be, till they be fulfilled. But there are proofs enough in it to make any man conclude, that the Jews shall at last be converted to the faith of Christ: nay, and more than that, that as their general rejection of our Saviour was the cause of the Gentiles being called into christianity; so the infidelity and coldness that is to be found among us, as to the christian religion, will be an occasion of bringing them over to the belief in Christ. And by this means will God raise the reputation of the christian religion, that is so horribly sunk away among us that do profess it.

But I dare say no more in so obscure an argument.

I pray God haſten the coming of his kingdom, that all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, may, with one heart and with one mouth, join together in the giving glory to God, thro' our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

To whom, &c.

End of the SIXTH VOLUME.